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## SOUTHERN COTTON MILLS *and* LABOR



*by*

MYRA PAGE



*With an Introduction*

*by* BILL DUNNE



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## Foreword

THIS little book welds an unbreakable bond uniting the revolutionary traditions of the English and American working class.

Engels, in one of the great Marxian classics, wrote of "The Conditions of the English Working Class in 1844," of the horrors of the early English factory system. In the twentieth century and in the United States, the most powerful imperialist country, whose "prosperity" is heralded throughout the world, and whose production methods are aped by the ruling classes of the European capitalist countries in carrying out their post-war program of rationalization, are duplicated in the Southern textile industry (which, with hydro-electric power and chemicals, form the base of the new Southern capitalism, as in the seventeenth century the textile industry was the base of rising English capitalism), the mass misery on which the English factory system was built.

The Reformation swept over England and destroyed the political superstructure of English feudalism. Cromwell and his Ironsides were the midwives of British capitalism. On the ruins of the old order, to the sound of slogan of Calvinism, were built the factories into which the English, Scotch, and Irish peasants were herded. King Charles lost his head, the peasantry lost the few rights they had wrung from the feudal barons, and the "independent" traditions of the English yeomanry passed into history. Swept from the countryside to make room for the sheep whose wool was the principal commodity traded in by the great maritime towns of Hanseatic League, the British peasants marched from serfdom to wage-slavery. The prisons were filled with debtors and the "sturdy rogues" of the Elizabethian statutes. To be landless and masterless was to be a criminal. The new factories did not furnish work for all the peasantry driven from the countryside. Neither did the home industry, producing some of

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the worst evils of the new system, take care of peasants driven to desperation by the closing of commons and the abolition of all communal privileges.

Yet to be jobless meant to be whipped at the tail of a cart "until the blood ran down to the heels" for the first offense, to have one's ears cut off for the second, and to be hung, drawn and quartered for the third.

The Cromwellian code was as barbarous as the feudal code which preceded it. But by it, in the fierce heat of a thousand fires where its opponents burned, and christened by the blood of a persecuted landless peasantry, British capitalism was born. Ireland and Scotland were brought to heel. The north of Ireland was made safe for the rising British capitalist class.

Thousands of the working class were deported or driven from England, Scotland and Ireland, to the American colonies. The ancestors of the new working class in the Piedmont section of the new South came from the class upon whose backs was built the whole edifice of British capitalism, Scotch, English and Irish peasants. They fled from Great Britain to escape the horrors of the factory system. They brought with them all the Evangelical superstitions of Puritanism. Debtors, fugitive indentured servants, the "landless and lawless" settled in the Piedmont region of eastern Tennessee, North and South Carolina, Virginia and Georgia. They fled to escape the unspeakable misery which rising capitalism brought to the masses of Great Britain and from which they found relief, to some extent at least, in the colonies of the New World.

Three hundred years later, their offspring, still burdened with the religious and cultural traditions of the Cromwellian period, are trapped by the new marvelous machines of modern American capitalism. These mountaineers, who for three centuries retained the illusion of independence given by the ownership of even a poor patch of land, now are tied to the most highly mechanized industry in the highest developed industrial country in the world. They are the modern serfs.

For three hundred years capitalism waited for these new victims. Oceans and continents were no barriers. In the new south has been repeated the process which turned the ancestors of this new contingent of the American working class into English proletarians, but the process has been intensified by the dire needs of capitalism in the imperialist epoch—"the period of wars and revolutions," when economic struggles bring workers rapidly into direct conflict with imperialist government.

The author has described this process. No Marxian will underestimate the significance of this book. The author has performed a surgical operation upon a portion of the body of American imperialism, an operation which discloses in detail the misery of the masses, the real basis for all the inflated claims which form the subject of the lyricisms of the propagandists for American efficiency and "prosperity"—a prosperity now shaken to its foundations.

This is no "study" by a social welfare worker. Sympathy and understanding are here, but primarily it is an incision, sharp and merciless, by a scalpel with a Leninist edge. It is a favorite trick of the liberal fraternity to charge Communists both with an ignorance of and a blinking of facts. Here is a complete reply. Here are the facts upon which the Communist Party of the United States has based its campaign in the South. Here are the facts which prove that the leadership of the American Federation of Labor, and more especially its loyal opposition, the so-called Muste wing, denying the existence of the class struggle and, therefore, the necessity for revolutionary working class strategy, tactics and objectives, is both unwilling and unable to give leadership to this new contingent of the American proletariat in conflicts which inevitably, consisting as they must of challenges to the whole system of capitalist robbery and oppression, take on, almost from their inception, sharp revolutionary characteristics.

The so-called left wing of the American Federation of Labor and its Socialist Party allies, precisely because its role is to preserve capitalism and not destroy it, approaches the whole question of the struggle in the South as though the Chartist revolts of



the 1830's in England has been transferred to the United States in this period, in the persons of the offsprings of the early immigrants, and from this false premise, draw the conclusion that the whole struggle of the Southern working class, and especially in the textile industry, is *merely* a struggle for the right to organize unions, etc., and is not a political struggle having definite revolutionary characteristics. Likewise, having a social-democratic conception of the role of the oppressed races, attempting to *strengthen* capitalism in this imperialist epoch by trying to convince white workers that they should act as "big brothers" to the oppressed Negro masses in the approved Y.M.C.A. style, they will not tell the American working class that the mass basis for a victorious struggle in the South, and consequently in the whole United States, consists precisely in the mobilization of the ten million Negro workers into the ranks of the American proletariat for the sharpest class battles against American imperialism.

The key by which the Southern masses will wrench open the door to victory, is the closest union of the "poor whites" so characteristically described in this book, and the still more oppressed Negro masses.

The entry of our Party into the South, the traditional stronghold of reaction in the United States, as the leader of sharp class conflicts, is an event of supreme importance to the revolutionary movement of the world. This book marks an end of one period and the beginning of another—the beginning of the revolutionary epoch in the United States. It symbolizes for all revolutionary workers the third period. Lenin never tired of insisting that Communist programs and tactics must be based on a most detailed knowledge of the conditions and sentiments of the masses. Were he alive today, I am sure he would consider this book as marking the ripeness of the new Southern proletariat for revolutionary struggle. The book is a Leninist document.

The fact that wide sections of the new Southern proletariat, Anglo-Saxon in ancestry, unschooled in Marxian theory of the social revolution, have fought bitter struggles under the leadership of our Party in the last few months is sufficient evidence to prove

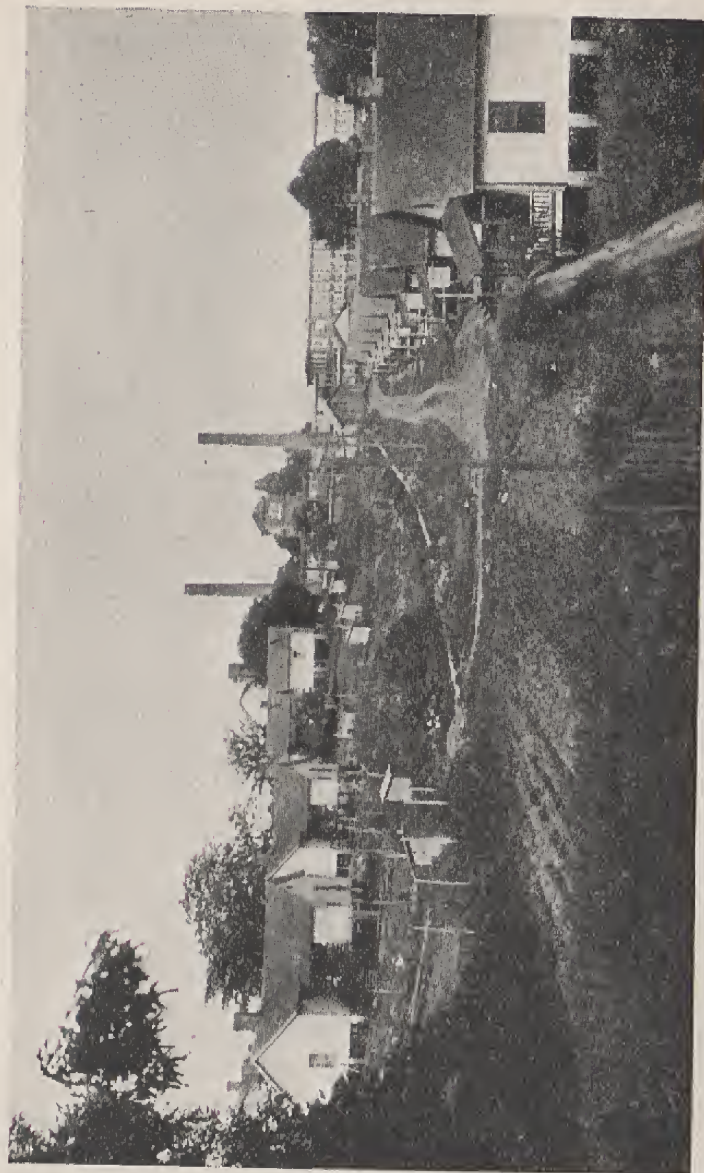
that our Party can and does act as the leader of militant American workers as the slogan of "class against class" takes on deeper meaning each day from life itself.

The wealth of first-hand material in this book would alone make it stand out as a working class document in contradiction to the reformist dribble compiled by social welfare workers. But coupled with the tremendous role played by our Party in the South, the upsurge of the Southern proletariat and the growing will to struggle of the whole American working class, this book has a direct revolutionary significance.

BILL DUNNE.







A CAROLINA VILLAGE STREET

*All the Streets in the Village Run Toward the Mill. (These Houses Are Above the Average)*

## Southern Cotton Mills and Labor

### CHAPTER I.

#### IN A SOUTHERN MILL VILLAGE

MRS. CRENSHAW'S, where I had been staying, was the best boarding house for mill hands on the hill. "The hill"—the term which these ex-mountaineers apply to every mill village—is in this case a flat stretch of yellow dirt, spotted with two hundred frame dwellings. The August sun rebounds from the sand in little balls of fire all over your body while hot drumsticks beat a jazz rhythm up your spine.

At one end of the cluster of shacks stands the mill, as if on guard, ungainly in its three shades of red brick, and rumbling day and night like some restless, driven beast. Each of its sections marks a stage in the owner's career. As his profits swelled, Mr. Hutchins added a section, moved into a bigger house in town, built a few more frame houses, and brought in more Poor Whites from the Blue Ridge hills and farms.

Next to the mill stands the company store, not only the buying mart but also the social center of Hutchins village. Here everything from tobacco and snuff to colored gingham and hog's meat is exhibited in true cubist fashion. On the farther edge of the village, four blocks away, stand the Methodist and Baptist churches, and nearby, the grammar school, a recent addition.

This is Hutchins Hill,<sup>1</sup> one of the nine mill villages forming a crescent around the city of Greenville, South Carolina. More than fourscore cities in the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee and Virginia can boast such a cluster. And each mill village in all these clusters is similar to Hutchins Hill.

<sup>1</sup>This is a literal description of a southern mill village, only names of persons and the name of the village are disguised.



Mr. Hutchins is king of the village, and all he surveys. The land, the mill, the churches, the store, the houses and the people all belong to him. The school which was his now belongs to the state, but it stands on company ground, is run by his taxes, and its five teachers are near-relatives or "friends of the family" of management.

Mr. Hutchins is a paternalist and a devout christian. He says he began his mill, as did all the other southern mill owners, soon after the black slaves were freed, to furnish employment for the Poor Whites who were starving on the farms or in the hills. He furnishes his mill people with houses at the low rate of twenty-five cents per room per week, free electricity, and one water pump in each block. True, the houses are built of thin boards, four rooms each, with no plastering, paper, sewerage or means of heating, but what can you expect for your money? It is much better than these folks were ever accustomed to, back in the hills. At the company store, Mr. Hutchins continues, mill hands can buy on credit, even up to the limit of next week's wages. (As the average wage for men is around \$12.00, and for women \$9.00, most families use this privilege. Which tends to cut down the high labor turnover, because how can you move on as long as you're in debt?)

The second week I was on the hill, the local sheriff frightened our household by paying me a visit.

"Mr. Wheeler, the super, sent me down here to be sure you ain't doin' no harm. We're keeful of strangers. You ain't here to stir up labor troubles, or a-spyin' for them northern mill owners? You know, Hutchins Company owns this here town and nobody kin set foot inside without its *per-mission*. I'm the town sheriff, and Hutchins mill pays my salary"—I quote his own words—"to see no-one stays home sick who should be at work, and nobody commits murder or adultery, and that no labor agitators gits in."

After learning I wasn't a dam Yankee, but came from Vir-ginny, he was easily reassured.

"Why, last year thar war a woman here talking this monkey

business, evylution she called it. Believe me, we chased her out in no time. Looks like folks'd think more of theirselves than believe they come from monkeys, don't it?" Since I was not in the village to educate sheriffs, I kept my peace.

Mr. Hutchins serves with the other mill presidents on the school board "to represent his people" and see that they are given a one hundred per cent, Anglo-Saxon, American Education. He pays three-fourths of the two preachers' salaries, so that the souls of his employees may be saved. On his staff he has placed a welfare worker whose duties are to run a social club for the girls to keep them pure, and to tend the sick and help the sheriff keep people from staying out when they should be at the mill at work, for "these people are a shiftless lot, but they come from the best stock—pure-blood Anglo-Saxon."

Hutchins, like the other mill villages, is not incorporated. Mr. Hutchins and the other owners feel that these people, who are "mere children," should be relieved of the responsibilities of corporate life.

At quarter to six in the morning the mill whistle blows. Men and boys in shabby blue overalls, girls in faded pink gingham, mothers in black and white checks and carrying sunbonnets, troop out of the houses and hurry down the dirt paths to the mill. At five in the afternoon the figures drag home. Only the 'teen age girls and boys have the pep left for sallies. Babies of all sizes trot up the streets, to greet their Mas and Pas, stretching up their arms as they run, and tired parents take them on their shoulders or lug them on their backs.

For a few hours the beast ceases to growl. With the growing hard times and the mills slowing down, Hutchins Mill has left off night work. In all the neighboring villages, as the day shift leaves the night shift comes on. Mill hands hate night work, even though it pays better and is a saving. Twice as many folks can use the beds—but then somebody has to cook twice as many meals, and it makes days and nights a jumble of working, sleeping and eating. Families get together only on Sun-



days. A man works in the day, his wife at night. Then during the day she can mind the kids and do the housework, and in between times snatch a few half hours of sleep.

The monotony of village life is broken only by the vegetable wagons of poor farmers in the surrounding country who drive through the streets hawking their wares, the weekly visits of the insurance man who knocks from door to door, collecting the ten cents a week insurance and carrying the latest gossip, and the loan sharks who come either to "furnish your home complete" on the five dollars down, one dollar a week plan, or to take back the furniture from somebody who hasn't the dollar this week.

Every Friday and Monday, there're the movin' vans. Then the discontented or roving ones pack their few belongings and hie them to the next village, while others come in to take their places, stay for a few weeks or months and then move on. When you ask "Why do you move so much?", nobody seems quite certain. One family said they had left their last place because of a mean super, another had heard wages might be better here, and many said they reckon they jes' had the habit and couldn't stay still long at a time. Sally, a mill worker since childhood, gave her version of it.

"We been here goin' on seven year now. It's time we wuz movin' on. Uh?-Why?-No, nuthin's wrong, only it's bes' not ta stay so long in one place. The company gits to thinkin' they owns you. 'N a body gits tired of the same faces."

For those who choose to take them, there are two other breaks in the monotony: window-shopping in the city Saturday afternoons, and church meetings. But Greenville is a car-fare or a hot walk of two miles away. Window-shopping is exciting, but it makes you envious, and the way those city folks look at a millhand'd make your face burn. They're that stuck up, when everybody knows there ain't better blood or charac'-ter to be found in South Carolina than on the hills. The older folks generally stay at home but the young ones must go to the be-

wildering city, even if they have to walk, so as to have the dime for that forbidden sin, the movie. Movies, novels, swimming pools and evylution are all immoral, according to Hutchins folk. But the young 'uns are fast taking to the first three sins, even though they are not sure but that they are playing into the hands of the Devil Himself.

I had been at Mrs. Crenshaw's three weeks now, and we had become fast friends. She and the others had long ago forgiven me that I was born out of the state. At least I wasen a dam Yankee but came from Virginny. It was a hot August



*Mill Village Children: Future Millhands*

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evening, and Mrs. Crenshaw was sweating over her ironing while I sat by, re-shortening a dress. All of the children and boarders had gone to a funeral director's party, so only the two of us were at home. We were in the midst of one of our confidential chats.

"Yes'm," she was saying (a southerner says yes'm or yessir to every one he considers his equal or his better, which among mill hands means everybody but "niggers"). "Yes'm, it's not so easy as it might be. Seems like us mill hands jes' work harder and git poorer year by year. But then, as our parson says, the Lord chastiseth those He loveth."

The iron spat vigorously as big drops of sweat hit its side and slid to the board. Mrs. Crenshaw was also a devout christian, as I had learned, and an old woman at forty-nine. She halted a minute to rub her dripping face and twitching mouth with arms that trembled with the palsey. Her muscles had worked without halt for forty-two years until now they had forgotten how to stop.

"Say, Mrs. Crenshaw, less call it a day. It's nine thirty and you've bin working since four thirty since morning." I knew, for I slept (in a feather bed) in the same room with her and her two daughters who worked in Hutchins mill. Each day of the three weeks I had spent there had been like the last.

Since early childhood, Mrs. Crenshaw had worked in the mill. After her marriage to a mill hand, she worked on, as usual. The seven children she had raised out of the thirteen she brought forth, all worked in the mill—except one boy, who had run away to sea and a less strenuous life! Then her husband died with cotton mill tuberculosis, and she changed over to running a boarding house for mill hands. For ten years she had cooked, swept, and done the washing in this double-sized company dwelling, for her children and seven other boarders. All told, there were fourteen of us sleeping in the four bedrooms.

Besides her potted plants, her sole diversion was Sunday preaching and Wednesday prayer meetings, where she could just sit for a while and join in the sad, sweet hymns, and hear about

the Blessed Beyond, where all is Res'. And she would weep for joy or sorrow, she never knew which.

"For myself, I am willin'," Mrs. Crenshaw spread out a pair of worn overalls on the board. "But for th' chillen I'd a-hoped it cud be differnt. I have never went to school, but I did wan'em to. Well—" and her voice rang with pride—"All of 'em kin read 'n write! But with wages so low, no matter how I saved and worked nights, I had to take 'em out of school sooner thin I'd a-planned on. Each one, I managed to keep in a little longer, 'til my youngest gal, she finished grammar school. She was so ambitious-like, Doris was."

Mrs. Crenshaw sighed and leaned on her iron. "No, honey, it ain't so easy for us poor folks." She stood looking off into space, at or for something which wasn't there.

"Now, Ma," Doris appeared in the doorway to reprove, "you shouldeen be doin' that thar ironin'."

"But it's high time it wuz done. You wuz to do it, las' night."

"Yes'm. But after tin hours on my feet in the spinnin' room this weather, looks like I jes' put it off."

Doris was a strongly-built, raw-boned girl with sandy hair and pale blue eyes—a typical Anglo-Saxon "Poor White Trash." Now she looked almost pretty in her pink organdy, her one dress-up dress which she worked overtime to buy and sat up nights to finish. (It would have been a sin to sew it on Sunday.) She was only nineteen, but looked thirty. However, her enthusiasm for perfume and colored handkerchiefs purchased from the five and ten cent store of a Saturday afternoon, for movies and "good times," and the way she tossed off her new-learned slang, all marked Doris one of the new generation. She could make a good union fighter.

"Well, it's al'right, honey," Mrs. Crenshaw concluded, "I only got one more."

As Doris disappeared again to the porch to bid her lover goodnight, Mrs. Crenshaw shook her head.

"Doris seems so dissatisfied like. She keeps me worrit. Some



days she's happy-like. Then some days she's like dumb with sadness. She wan's to make sometun of herself, not jes' be a mill hand. Here's her and Bob in love, and him wantin' to marry her, and she says no, workin' in th' mill is bad enuf without havin' a string o' young 'uns to look after, like the res' of th' wimmen does. Once she went to th' city to git work. She wanted to work herself up, ta keepin' books or runnin' a typewriter, or somethin' like that. But once they knows you is a mill hand, there ain't a chance. She worked awhile in the tin cint store, but 'twuz as bad as here, she sed. So she came back."

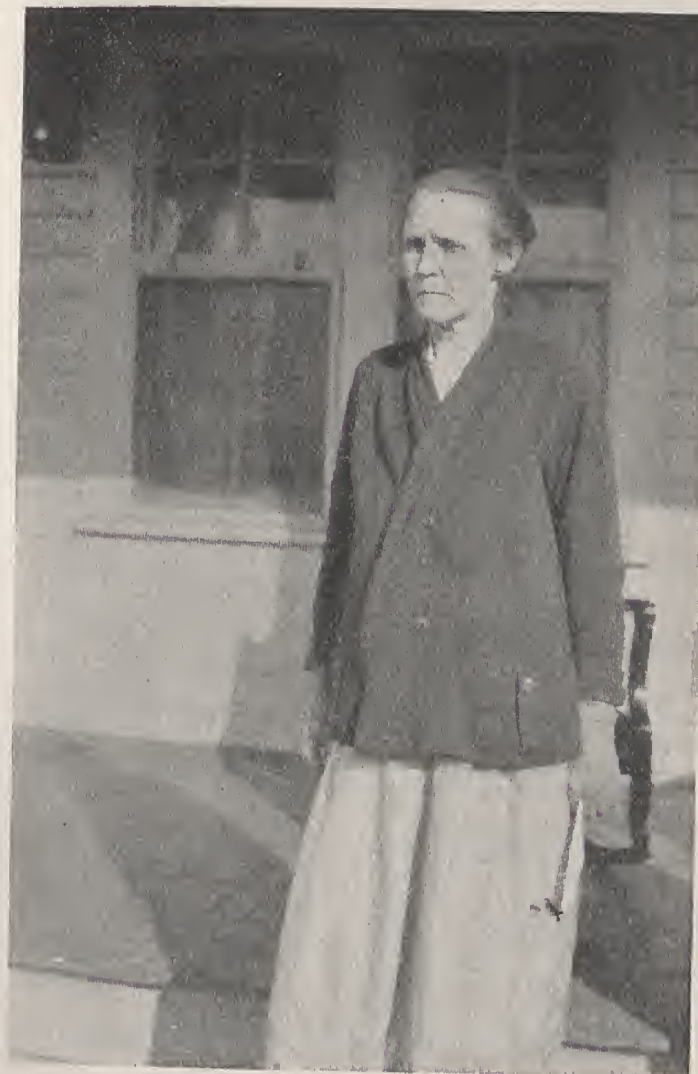
"An' Sara," here Mrs. Crenshaw forgot herself to the point of sitting down, "she keeps me bothered too. You know, she's navah bin strong in her mind. Doctor sed she's not hed th' right vittals when she wuz growin' up, 'n it affected her nerves like. Today she took another fit in th' mill 'n they brung her home.

"I tell you honey, but for my faith in God and His goodness, I couldn't go on. I keep lookin' forward to Heaven. As the Holy Book says—"

We were interrupted by the return of the boarders from the undertaker's party. Decked out in their best, they shambled in and gathered around the oil cloth table where we sat working. The men looked uncomfortable but excited in their stiff collars and white bow ties. The faces of the girls and women were flushed and shining. Each one had discarded her gingham for the occasion and wore her—or if she didn't have one, somebody else's—Sunday best.

First came Tom, with his "ole 'oman." They were in the fifties. Tom used to be a fiddler in the Carolina mountains, and earned his living at one of those year-round resorts making music for those Yankee tourists to dance by. It paid better than moonshining and was safer. People said Tom loved his fiddle better even than his ole 'oman. Then, Tom got a "conviction of Sin," as only mountaineers can get it. He had always known dancing to be the work of the Devil, and had turned his eyes from the whirling figures while his fiddle sang "Turkey'n th' Straw." And Maggie had told him these were forriners anyway,

and not hill people. But the conviction of Sin was not to be denied. He was aiding in the Devil's work. So sorrowfully he gave up his job, left the mountains and he and Maggie came to the mills to work. They were then in the middle thirties.



Maggie, Tom's ole 'oman



We couldn't get Tom to play his fiddle. When we asked, he just shook his head. He never said anything, except at table, "Thank-ye for th' beans." There was a fiddlers' contest on and over a hundred fiddlers in the South Carolina hills and mill villages were going to take part. No violinists allowed, only fiddlers. Everybody begged Tom to take part, but he just shut his eyes and shook his head. Maggie told us he said to her, "Go there 'n show 'em my ignorance?"

Late at night I've heard Tom in his room, which was just above ours, fiddling an old English ballad or some hymn. Once he started "Turkey 'n th' Straw," but stopped abruptly, and then played, "Yield Not to Temptation, for Yielding Is Sin."

Maggie, Tom's ole 'oman, was somewhat different from Tom. She, too, was ashy gray, but not so dead-quiet. She was a traveled woman for these parts, coming from out the state—*Kin-tucky!* Her first ole man had been a miner. One day there was another accident at the mine, and Maggie, waiting with the other women at the shaft, found her man had got his. Maggie liked to tell of mining life in the *Kin-tucky* mountains, but she told me she thought mill villages nicer, because here a woman could work out as well as a man. Often in the evenings, Maggie would read the *Greenville News to Tom*. She read with difficulty, spelling out word by word. But then Tom could not read at all.

Next came Abbie and Frank, followed by Doris and Sara, and the mill hands, Joe, Bill, and Harry. "Little Gladys," who brought up the rear, looked wild-eyed and even whiter than usual behind her anemic freckles. She was tightly clutching a paw of each parent. Little Gladys' parents both worked in the mill, while she, before and after school hours, set and waited on the table and helped her Grandma, Mrs. Crenshaw, with the dishes and sweeping. Every day the same movie was repeated, of eight-year-old Gladys sneaking away to play and her grandma hot on her trail, yelling "Glad-ys," until finally the child was rounded up for work again, until she could sneak away! Little

Gladys had one overpowering ambition, to learn to play the py-ano. But her Ma and Pa always told her there was no money and no time, and besides, there was nobody on the hill who could teach her right. They all played by ear. When Little Gladys found I played by note, she thought God Himself had sent me to her, and I think her Grandma and parents thought so, too! Anyway, we had one or two short lessons a day. Now it was into the parlor and not into the yard that Mrs. Crenshaw called "Glad-ys," but more softly and less frequently.

"What are you goin' to do when you grow up, Little Gladys?" I asked her.

"You mean whin I'm fourteen? I wana be a music teacher, but Ma says I can't 'n th' mills th' bes' place fer me. Pa, he says he wans to keep me in school as long as he kin. He couldn go enuf hisself. But I guess I'll be a mill hand. Where'd you say C sharp was?"

Annie, Maggie's step-daughter, was a pretty Celtic type and full-blown at twenty. She and Frank had been married five years and had had two children, Jack, now four years old, and a little 'un that died. Soon there was to be another, but Annie had not stopped work at the mill. Frank was an energetic lad of twenty-four and in many ways the most intelligent person I met on the hill. He had come back south during the last war, and his falling for Annie tied him to the mills for life. Overseas he had been gassed and his lungs were going bad on him. He even had hemorrhages, but the government had refused him compensation.

"Next time there's a war," he told me, "somebody else can do the fighting. I fell for the Democracy stuff 'n volunteered. *But it wuz a rich man's war 'n a poor man's fight.*" This I found a popular phrase on the hill. "It wuz Wallstreet 'n th' bankers that made that war, 'n us poor folks what went to th' front."

Frank had been a union man up north, and he told us that it was "as different as daylight and night in a union mill



and this one here. But Annie won't leave, and there'll never be a union here, th' people won't stick together enuf."

Annie read *True Stories* and liked to go to Square-dances and Socials. "But Frank jes' likes to sit home 'n talk," she complained. 'N I hev to hide my magazines from him, else he burns 'em up. He thinks they're evil. But they're no harm. It's all *true*."

I was curious to learn more of the funeral director's party.

There were two undertakers in Greenville who were competing for the mill villagers' trade. The trade was worth competing for, as the death-rate almost kept pace with the soaring birth-rate, and funerals were important occasions among mill folk. One of the hearse-boomers had conceived of the novel—to me at least—idea of giving a party to each village, at his funeral parlors. Big trucks had come to collect the diked-up workers and carry them to the rooms. First, they had been received in the parlors with their green palms and display of coffins. Each worker, so Maggie told us, picked out the coffin he would like to be buried in and dreamed of a service over him in this swell room. "when for once he'd be a somebody." Then they went into the undertaker's house itself, and his wife "was real nice and friendly-like." (The trade was evidently worth concessions.) They played the radyo and served ice cream and cake.

"My, how I would like to be laid away in that coffin with a pink satin lining. And with that swell pink robe. Jes' once, to wear satin!", Annie sighed. Then, with a change of tone, "Frank, remember what I'm saying."

"Uh-huh," Frank answered. "Say, I chose that same pink-lined coffin myself. Gee, it'd be swell!"

Conversation became eager and soft, all speaking up but Tom and Maggie as to what they had chosen to be laid away in. Evidently the undertaker's party had been a real success. As soul-uplifting as the revivals. Everything made way in the villages for the revivals, which came regularly three times a year. Everything but the mill. At nights when one was going on, you could hear the wails and hallelujahs mingling with its rhythmic growls.

Finally Maggie turned to me and said, "Well, somehow I doan take no stock in sech doins. Looks like us mill workers thinks too much of death and what comes after."

"Everybody's takin' insurance. I guess you noticed it?" I nodded. I had. Five or ten cents a week on every man, woman and child. Go without, but don't fail to have that insurance money when the collector knocks at your door. They took out policies on babies still in arms, and it proved good business. So many of them died. Nobody seemed to know how to cut down on the yearly crop of babies, though some tried nursing their kids until they were two or three years old, the idea being that a nursing woman can't be made pregnant. Others tried cruder but no more successful methods. Some quoted the Bible to show that such a yearly increase was "God's Will," but I noticed that many of the women shut their mouths tight when the subject came up and shook their heads.

"Well," Maggie continued "partly they takes it out for sickness or a rainy day, but mostly it's to have a fine funeral. To be laid away in a fine coffin 'n a fine dress 'n be somebody fer once. We-ll," she looked around defiantly, "I'd ruther hev mine while I'm alive."

Mrs. Crenshaw nodded. "Money should go to th' living 'n not be put away under ground."

"You sed it, Mom. But it'd be mighty nice," and Doris smoothed her crumpled pink dress.

It was now past bed time, but everybody was too excited for sleep. Parties were rare. And such a party! Anyway, this was Friday, and only five hours' work tomorrow.

"Let's sing some hymns," Annie looked about appealingly. "You'll play 'em, Bill?"

Bill agreed. So Mrs. Crenshaw rose and unlocked the door to the sacred room, the parlor, and we all marched in. There was a red carpet on the floor, and a lamp with a pink shade, and real py-ano, all of which represented lord knows how many years of savings on the part of the eight Crenshaws. Even the son at sea had contributed his share. Almost every house on the hill had



some kind of musical instrument, a guitar, a banjo, or a fiddle, or maybe a wheezy organ you work with your feet. Hill people love music like they love flowers. But the Crenshaws had a room set aside for a parlor and a real py-ano in it, which set them off as part of the social elite of Hutchins hill.

Little Gladys opened the one hymn book and they began. "What a Friend We Have in Jesus, All Our Sins and Grievs to Bear." All knew the words by heart, and sang the harmonies with a chanting fervor and unconscious abandon equal almost to that of the Negroes. But this was far less musical, and less native. These Poor Whites had left their folk songs in the mountains, and mill life has not produced any others.

The next afternoon I went to see my friend, Marg. Marg was always a tonic, especially after such an experience as last night. Marg knew her Bible—you had to or be an outcast in the village—but her religion didn't bother her much. She thought and spoke for herself, and few gainsaid her, at least to her face. She belonged to the clan of Allen—feuders and government-fighters—and believed in Direct Action.

"Stept right in, honey," Marg called from her place in the swing. She pulled her black-and-grey-checked dress tighter over her bosom, shifted her powerful frame so as to make room beside her, and with the hem of her dress wiped away the little brown streams of tobacco juice which had dried in the corners of her mouth.

"As I wuz sayin' th' las' time you was here, Hutchins mill ain't so good for wages, but I've lived on worse hills. Hutchins is got a good char-ac-ter 'n that means a lot. All mills ain't. I wuz in one, once, soon after we come down from the mountains. My ole man hed ceasted, so it wuz jes' me to care for th' babies. Every day I locked 'em in th' house afore I went to th' mill, 'n every night I run home scairt th' house 'd burned down. I tell you, them wuz hard days, before th' hours wuz cut to tin.

"Well, that mill had a bad char-ac'-ter, 'n I wanted to git away. You know, us mill people ain't got nuthin' but our moral character, 'n we wanna keep on to that. Now you may be a good 'oman, but

folks figger that if you live on a hill's what's got a bad name, you're no better thin th' res' or you'd move. Well, I couldn't move. N'th' company's house nex' to mine wuz a bad house. Time'n agin, I tole th' sheriff, 'Jim, make that 'oman leave town.' But he wouldn't. 'N I see with my own eyes, policemen goin' in 'n out. Sech drinkin' 'n carryin' on, you navah heard. 'N my gal gittin' bigger'n bigger, 'n me gone all day. So finally I made up my mind I'd take th' law in my own hands. Our family's used to that.

"So I gits down my gun, 'n I starts off to th' police office. It was a Sadday aftanoon, 'n th' room wuz full of officers-of-th'-law, but I walks right up to th' desk, 'n I slams my hand down, 'n I says, 'Jim,' I says, 'I come to give warnin.' If you doan clean up that bad house before *nex* Sadday, I *will*. My gun's ready. And what's more,' her mountain eyes glittered happily as she told this, 'what's more, every blue coat 'n every brass button I see, them's my target.'

"And' that's how I cleaned up Selby," Marg concluded. "Come in, Miz Jones," she called to a little old woman, gnarled like a mountain oak, who was hobbling up the walk. "You wan some of my herbs, honey. Jes' help yourself. You know where they is. Brew 'em a little 'n apply th' warm juice to his rumitiz. It'll help. You might tie a string around his waist 'n middle left finger, too."

"Honey," Marg turned back to me, "I tell you what's on my mind. It's my boy, Tom. He wants to be an e-lectrician, in th' worse way. Ever since he wuz a littl' boy, he's hankered after machinery 'n things like that. He's buyed books'n fixin's of all kinds. Well, his sis 'n him 'n me been savin' fer seven year now, so's he cud take th' course. By corryspondence, they call it. It cost one hundred and fifty dollar, but seein' as Tom was so anxious, they tole him he cud tek it fer ninty-five. But we jes' can't seem to git that much ahead. Sickness, or th' mill runnin' slow, or somethin', jes sets us back. Tom's twenty-seven now, 'n I doan know's he ever will."

"Couldn't he take it up around here, at school, say?"

"Naw. They doan learn 'em no trade thar but mill work. I



tell you, honey, *these mill owners wants to keep us in th' mills*. I knows, I've a-watched 'em forty-five year now. My gal tells me I shud keep my mouth shut. But I *knows*."

Marg peered through the green vines at another visitor coming up the walk.

"That you, Miz Rhoads?"

"Yes'm, it's me. Kin I hev 'n ear o' corn?"

"Help yourself. Only git 'em ripe. 'N woan ye set a spell?"

Marg lowered her voice. "We live in common like, us six families here." With her right thumb she indicated the houses fronting the little square of dirt before us. "Each one's got a littl' patch. Wages bein' what they is, we couldn't git along without. One raises beans 'n peas, another, yellers' 'n tatters. 'N me, I raises corn. Whin meal time comes, we jes' go 'n help ourselves.

"Now, th' drought 'n hot weather is killin' our crops, 'n th' mill's only runnin' part time. I tell you, they're gittin' us lower 'n lower. They wan us on our knees, that's what. We ain't low enuf fer 'em, yit. Millionaires they are, Mr. Hutchins 'n th' res'. 'N I remember him as a littl' boy so poor he'd no breeches to cover him.

"They made their money out of us. I look at their fine houses whin I go into town, 'n I thinks to myself, 'You made that out 'o us. If *we* waran so poor, *you'd* not be so rich.' 'N I rememba what th' Good Book says about th' rich 'n th' poor. They'll git theirs when they die."

"Hell?" I asked.

Marg spit a brown stream neatly between the rails.

"What else?" she answered.

"Well, that idea doan satisfy me," I replied, and we were off on an argument.

On Monday, after working hours, I went over to see Katy. Katy had come over from Brandon to stay with her married sister and mind her kids, while her sis worked in the mill. Katy's baby was still too little and sickly for her to go back to spinning, yet. Her sister's youngest child was six months, and her oldest,

nine years, with a chain of five between. This system, of working between babies and minding the neighbor's just before and after your new one came, so they can work awhile, is well worked out. Luckily, the babies are not all born at the same time of year. Now, since no child under fourteen is allowed to work in the mills without special permit, there is another system. The oldest child, below working age, whether eight, nine, or twelve, takes its Ma's place in the kitchen and minds the string of little ones, and Ma goes into the mill. There is a compulsory school law for those under fourteen, but no one pays any attention to that—except some of the kids, who "want larning," and cry and beg, and get their parents to crying, too. But in the end, they usually have to quit so Ma can work alongside Pa.

Katy's brother and sister lived on the edge of the village where the poorest cottages stood. No trees or flowers here. Only yellow dirt, flies and sizzling heat. Around their shack ran a high chicken-wire fence, and the gate was locked. Inside stood Katy, minding twelve half-naked and squalling children. Katy herself was as small and undeveloped in body as a little girl of ten. When you saw her face for the first time it came like a shock to you that she was a grown woman. The more you looked at her, the more puzzled you became. She looked ten and she looked fifty. Her once blue dress hung like a sack straight from her flat chest to just below her knees, she was bare-foot, and her straw-colored hair ended irregularly below the margin of her ears. Altogether, with her skiny arms and legs and her wistful eyes, she was a child. But her pallor and drawn look around the mouth rightfully belonged to old people. There are many in the villages like Katy, whom the mill has gotten too young.

Yet there was a certain potential prettiness about Katy. Her character was like her body—a strange mixture. She had never known childhood, and she had never been allowed to grow up.

"The thing's what's wrong with me," Katy explained one day after one of her coughing spells, "I went to work whin I wuz too little. Th' mill stunted my growth. I wuz eight year when Pa took a stroke, 'n there wuz five of us kids 'n me th' oldest. I wuz



only in school two weeks, when I had to quit 'n go to th' mill to work. All we had wuz what I could earn, less than two dollars. I cried, 'n Ma 'n Pa cried, 'n all th' littl' uns cried, but what war that to do? It warn't th' work so much, tho there wuz no limit to hours thin, 'n th' lint 'n dampness was somethin' awful. But it wuz, I wanted larnin' th' worse way in th' world."

"But how could you live on two dollars a week?" I asked.

"We had to. By doin' without. In two year my brother come into th' mill too, so thin it wuz easier. But I navah got back to school."

"But you can read."

Sure, I larned myself how. But I doan know how to write. Looks like somethin' wrong, whin kids wana larn, 'n doan git th' chance?"

"You bet, there is, Katy."

"There wuz a man thru here las' winter 'n he tole us in secret about a country, Rushia, what all kids git a real chance at schooling. Schools are free, like here, and th' government sees that every kid has clothes and vittles 'n a place to live while he's agoin' to school. . . . Hush up, honey," she turned to take up her squalling baby and feed it a little warmed tobacco juice. As she raised herself once more, and pushed her hair out of her eyes behind her ears, her face took on one of those queer, far-seeing looks.

"Whar's that thar Rushia? Why doan we hev it thata way here?"

This Monday afternoon I found Katy frantic.

"My baby's gonna die! Oh, I'm afeart my baby's gonna die. Th' doctor jes' come, 'n sed it got typhoid 'n running off of th' bowels. It's from these stinks 'n flies, 'n my baby what's all I got sinkin' lower 'n lower. My Gawd, what 'm I gona do?"

The baby lay in a little home-made cradle on the porch. It was covered with sores which the flies tried to reach thru the mosquito netting. At each feeble whimper Katy moaned, "Hush honey, thar now, honey," and waved away the flies.

By evening Katy's baby was dead.

A few evenings later we were sitting on Jim-and-Sally's front porch; Annie, Frank and I. Mary and Sam had come over with their brood, and a friendly but determined religious controversy was waging between them. Jim and Sally were Methodists, and Mary and Sam, Holynests, and the argument seemed to be over the origin of Sin. Innumerable kids crawled over and under us as we talked and chewed and spit tobacco juice into the blue night.

Jim had been a Georgia farmer, a Poor White, farming five acres. He and Sally and the littl' uns had worked from sun to sun in the cotton patches, trying to pay off the mortgage. Then the boll-weevil, one year, and a "banner cotton crop" the next drove him off the land and set him to wandering from one cotton mill to the next. And the funny thing was, Jim did not blame the bankers who took his land, nor the system which made big crops a disaster, but "those dam niggers." Here he, an Anglo-Saxon, white man, had to turn mill hand while some of those colored farmers had held on to their small plots of ground.

Tom was studying mechanics in the evenings, after work, so as to be able, as he told me, "to larn my boys a trade 'n give 'em a chance. All th' young uns of us poor people, all they got to look forward to is goin' into th' mill or on th' farm. I'm gona make it different fer my boys."

Sam and Mary had no plans for their kids, nor did most of the mill hands with whom I talked. When asked, "Do you want your kids to go in th' mills?" the answer was usually "Naw", stating that the life was too hard and they'd like to see their kids get an education and make something of themselves. "But what else," they invariably added, "*kin* they be?"

Somehow the discussion of Sin had led Jim to a denunciation of the last war.

"Yep, it wuz a rich man's war 'n a poor man's fight, sure enuf," Sam echoed.

"Wahl," Jim went on, "thar's another war acomin'—between



th' rich 'n th' poor. A rich man over in Atlanta sed that war th' only war he afeart. 'N it was a-comin'."

"Do you think he is right?"

"Ya, I reckon so."

"Sure, we workin' people can't go on like this forever."

"Do you want to see it? How'll it turn out?"

"Wahl, I figger it this way. God's gona be on th' side of th' poor because it's us what supports his work. Th' rich may give th' money, but it's us poor what goes 'n does His work."

Sally rocked approbation. "Ya, its us poor'll win."

"How come you got to bring God into it?" Frank asked.

"We'll win because we got thousands to their one, 'n if we all stick together they can't run a dam mill, or train or ship or mine. We'll jes' take 'em over 'n run 'em for ourselves."

"By gorry," Sam exclaimed, "How come you evah thought it out so plain, Frank?"

"Jim, has there ever been a union here?"

All looked at one another, then Mary spoke up crisply. "I'll say thar war. Sam here wuz among th' first to jine 'n th' las' to give in."

The story followed, one I heard often on the hill, since they were sure I was not spying for the company. During the war, "th' I.W.W." had come. A woman organizer who posted bills, made fiery speeches, and pleased and frightened their souls by the evil things she said of the company. Everybody was for joining the union. The news spread to all the villages that someone had come to help them at last, and there were spontaneous strikes with nobody to lead them. Like over in Judson mill, where around nine thirty one hot morning all the spinners walked out and sat on the ground in front of the mill. The boss spinner ran out, demanding, "What you doin' here? Why ain't ye workin'?" Nobody moved. "We ain't acomin' back 'till you raise th' rate five cents a spool. Th' Bible says a workman's worthy of his hire." "Hell," says the boss spinner, which is also in the Bible, "wahl, I reckon I kin git me some more hands to take your place. You kin jes' set here." And he went back into the mill. So they sat for an hour,

some arguing to go back, and some to go home. Weavers and carders peeped out of the windows at them. Nobody on the grass thought about trying to get them to come out, too. After another half an hour, somebody started moving toward the mill. Then everybody got up and went inside.

Over here on Hutchins hill, they had 85 per cent joined up, and had secret meetings with the organizer. Then, as they found out afterwards, a company tool got himself elected secretary and everything started going wrong. Right away the workers took to quarreling among themselves. One night a bunch of rowdies, hired by the company, came from another hill and threw rotten eggs and stones at the organizer and drove her out of town, and threatened her to ever come back. She did come back, once, and held another secret meeting but it looked like things was all wrong, by then. And that was the end of the union. Since then the company had kept the sheriff and spies to keep a watch out.

"There was two main troubles," Sam threw in. "One wuz us not stickin' together good enuf, 'n tother we hadn't no money to hold out. Everybody owed the company store, 'n we'd sure run out of vittles, right off. Next time it'll be different. We'll hev to git money ahead from somewhere."

"But th' union's th' right thing fer us mill people. Frank, you sed you belonged to a union up north, how'd yours work?"

"Yessir, I belonged, in Jersey, 'n it worked fine. Say, I'll tell you about it whin you come over to our place, tomorrow night, to tell Myra goodbye. It's too late to start tonight."

On Saturday evening we all gathered in Mrs. Crenshaw's parlor, these four, Marg and her two young'uns, and Mrs. Crenshaw's household. Even Katy had roused herself to come when she heard I was leaving the hill for a visit home, having been called there by a family illness.

I shall never forget their faces as Frank told of the struggles of the northern textile workers for a union, how they had suffered, been defeated but finally had won out; what conditions were like before, and what they were like now. Things were hard for them still, but much better than down here. Mrs. Cren-



shaw sitting, as she did in church, with unnoticed tears slipping over her twitching mouth, Katy, wide-eyed, pressing her empty arms to her flat chest. Doris, fired up, but restless. They listened without a word until the story was ended. Then questions began to pour in.

"We kin do that, too," Jim declared, "See if we doan."

As Katy left, she plucked me by the sleeve and whispered, "You'll send me a letter 'n doan mind if I doan answer, becus you know I kin read but not write. 'N cud you send me a book tellin' about that thar country whar all kids kin go to school?"



*Tom, ex-mountaineer, who has been a millhand for twenty-five years*

## CHAPTER II.

### ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF SOUTHERN COTTON MILLS.

SOUTHERN mill hills, with their thousands like Tom, Marg, Sam, and Mrs. Rhoads, first developed in the period following the Civil War, when the industrial life of the South, centering around textiles, was born. While as early as 1810 the cotton mill industry had appeared in the South, and by 1860 had reached the extent of 15 mills with approximately 328,000 spindles and an annual product worth 10,000,000 dollars, the South's economic life in this period was still predominantly agricultural. Then came the Civil War, when Southern slave-holders fought to regain control of the federal government from Northern industrialists. Southern cotton mills worked to capacity during the war, and following the conflict, it was this developing industry which was largely responsible for the South's slow but certain economic recovery. The older economic order, founded upon slavery and the plantation system of agriculture, had now been destroyed by the machine age, and the slave owners vanquished by Northern industrialists. This defeated ruling class of the South now set about recapturing their former economic and political advantages. How was this to be done? Post-war agriculture offered little opportunity, for equipment was depleted and agriculture generally demoralized. Furthermore, these Southern aristocrats had learned the lesson of the war well. They recognized that political power and wealth in modern capitalistic society was based on ownership of factories, mines and railroads and exploitation of wage-earners. Also they were finding it more profitable to work Poor Whites at the machines than on the land. So the surplus Southern land-owners were able to squeeze out of their colored and white tenants and farm-laborers they invested primarily, not in agriculture, but in cotton mills.

The mill owners' profits accumulated rapidly. Labor was



plentiful and to be had for almost nothing. There were also advantages of cheap and accessible raw materials, water-power, low rents, and ready markets. No wonder that cotton mills sprang up like mushrooms. Merchants and all others who had any money to invest hastened to buy cotton mill stock.

From this period to the present time, the expansion of the Southern textile industry has been consistently rapid.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOUTHERN COTTON GOODS INDUSTRY  
1850-1927<sup>1</sup>

Year	Number of Establishments	Capital Invested	Operatives	Spindles	Looms	Lbs. Cotton Consumed
1850	166	\$7,256,056	10,043	—	—	—
1860	165	9,840,221	10,153	298,551	8,789	45,786,510
1870	151	11,088,315	10,173	327,871	6,256	34,351,195
1880	161	17,375,897	16,741	542,048	11,898	84,528,757
1890	239	53,821,303	36,415	1,554,000	36,266	250,837,646
1900	401	124,596,874	97,559	4,299,988	110,015	707,842,111
1919	726	828,729,437	124,544	14,754,303	286,933	1,516,905,394
1927	1,000	1,100,000,000	300,000	17,938,344	—	—

In 1927, the Southern cotton states had nearly one-half of the installed spindles in United States mills, and over 46 per cent of the cotton looms. The number of active spindles was more than half of the country's total. Nearly one half of the cotton mill operatives were at work in Southern mills. North and South Carolina hold first and second place respectively in the Southern branch of the textile industry, and from a national standpoint they hold second and third place. Georgia has many mills, while Tennessee and Virginia are less important textile states. With the rapid trend of the textile industry southward, this region promises to play an even more predominant role in the economic and social developments in textiles. Consequently, social conditions in Southern mill villages have wide significance.

<sup>1</sup> Figures for the years 1850-1900, inclusive, are taken from Broadus Mitchell, *Rise of Cotton Mills in the South*, p. 63. Figures for 1919 are quoted from U. S. Fourteenth Census, Volume X, pp. 148-149, 167. The 1927 figures are based on estimates given in the *Blue Book of Southern Progress*, 1928, issued by Manufacturers' Record, Baltimore, Md.

The method of developing a Southern cotton mill, with its satellite village, was usually as follows: Having put up his rather modest mill, surrounded by a few frame shacks, the mill owner would send solicitors among the impoverished tenant-farmers of the lowlands and mountains. It was not difficult to get thousands of Poor Whites to leave the farm for the cotton mill, for the picture given of mill village life was a rosy one, and life on the land was desperately hard. The newly freed Negroes were also eager for work at the mills, but the mill owners employed only a few of them for manual and unskilled jobs around the mill. As profits swelled and the market expanded, mill-owners sent their solicitors out to bring in more Poor Whites from the hills and lowlands.

Thousands of these new recruits returned, disillusioned, to farming. Conditions in these early villages were of the worst.



THE COTTON MILL—*Generator of Village Life*

similar to those existing in the first period of the industrial revolution in England. In both instances, manufacturing interests took



advantage of the necessity of unorganized workers and exploited them to the limit. There were no restrictions on hours in the first decades of Southern industry's development, wages were a mere pittance, and child labor was common. Children as young as eight and ten years worked for as little as ten cents a day. In some cases a small child was paid twenty-two cents for a week's labor. The Negro workers were segregated into the most unsanitary of shacks and paid the least of all.

While many returned to the land, other thousands had no choice but to remain in the mills and bequeath to their children and their children's children the heritage of being "mill hands." Today there are nearly 300,000 cotton mill workers living, with their dependents, in hundreds of company-owned villages throughout the South-Atlantic and South Central regions. Of these all but a few thousand are Poor Whites, the others being colored workers.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### *POOR WHITE AND COLORED LABOR.*

**S**OUTHERN cotton mill workers are descendants primarily of agricultural Poor Whites, while a small proportion of them trace their ancestry back to Negro slaves. Their economic and social background throws considerable light on their present problems and outlook.

Large plantation agriculture, manned by Negro slave labor, established the southern Poor Whites as a geographically and socially isolated class. These small farmers, descendants of those colonists who came to the south-atlantic colonies as debtors or indentured servants, soon found competition with large plantation owners so one-sided that they were forced on to poorer and poorer land and into greater and greater poverty. This process went on for decades. First they were pushed into the foothills. Many

of them retreated into the Appalachian and Blue Ridge mountains, there to cast in their lot with those Pennsylvania Dutch and Scotch-Irish settlers who had migrated southward. Seemingly, this section of the Poor Whites preferred the illusions of semi-independence and social equality which their greater isolation gave. Here in the mountains there were no plantation owners or merchant aristocrats, no Negro slaves. The competition was no less real, but more indirect. These differences in the situation of highland and lowland Poor Whites led, after some generations, to minor differences in the traditions of the two, but these have never been fundamental enough to affect the basic unity between them. Poor Whites have generally shared the traits characteristic of southern culture: Democratic politics, belief in states' rights and in Anglo-Saxon superiority, and strong prejudices and practices against the Negro. Mountaineer Poor Whites, however, have tended to be more independent, often Republican in politics, and less intolerant of Negroes—as long as isolated from them. While lowland Poor Whites fought on the southern side in the Civil War, many mountaineers, believing that the slaves should be freed and "the Union preserved," volunteered for the Federal Army. Here the differences end, becoming submerged in the many similarities existing among all Poor Whites.

As a tenant and day-labor farming class, these highlanders and lowlanders form a homogeneous group. Anglo-Saxon in physique and medieval in social habits, they are set off from the rest of the southern population and stigmatized by them as "White Trash," "Poor Whites," "Hill Billies," and "No Counts." Each state has its additional nicknames for them. In North Carolina they are called "Tar Heels" and "Dirt Eaters"; in South Carolina, "Sand Hillers," and in Georgia, "Crackers." The professional politicians of the democrat and Republican parties refer to them derisively as the "one-gallus boys." (One strap of bed-ticking holds up their trousers. For "gallus" read suspenders.) All of these terms are significant as indicating the inferior social status of the cotton states' agricultural poor.

Yet the White Trash have confused the facts concerning



their conditions as small farmers with the reasons for it. Believing the main cause of their difficulties to have been the unequal competition to which they were subjected by large-scale agriculture based upon slave labor, they carried over their hatred for this system to the Negro, even illogically holding him responsible for their hardships! They overlooked the fact that the slaves were even more the victims of this system, and that it was the plantation-owners who exploited both white and colored. The Negroes, for their part, despised and mistrusted the Poor Whites. For these mutual prejudices and suspicions, both white and colored labor in the south are still paying a heavy penalty. Slave-holders and employers, on the contrary, have greatly profited by race prejudice.

The most powerful factors retarding this people's social development have been their isolation, their extreme poverty and their necessary absorption in the cruder aspects of the struggle for existence. Poor roads and forbidding mountain trails made social contacts outside of the family very rare indeed. Widespread illiteracy has prohibited contact through the written word. There has been no time nor money for books, for those few who could read. In the past, there were no regular, free schools within reach of the children, and the poor farmers could not afford, in any case, to take their children out of the field and place them in the class room. In consequence, illiteracy and child labor became a customary though disliked part of their life. Stunted bodies, undeveloped minds and high rates of illness and death in southern rural regions are some of the results.

All aspects of the tenants' and farm laborers' standard of living have been equally low. They have always been in debt, always seeking credit from or trying to meet their accounts with the landlords, village merchant, and sometimes in recent years, with the bankers. This continual indebtedness to townsmen coupled with townsmen's scorn for these "No 'Counts" has bred in the latter a strong dislike and distrust of city people.

The average farming incomes in the cotton states are extremely low, ranging from a gross yearly income of \$153.00 for

croppers to \$251.00 for renters, and \$626.00 for owners. Farm owners among the whites are less than one-half of those farming, and among the Negroes, less than one-fifth. When the production expenses, which are estimated at the minimum to be \$115.00, are subtracted from the gross income, the farm family has very little cash left with which to meet its many needs! Agricultural labor is paid around twenty to twenty-five cents a day, or approximately \$6.50 a month. Assuming eight months' steady work, a laborer can earn only \$52 a year. Their conditions of life have caused the southern tenant class to become a migrating people. Not all have migratory habits, but the majority of them are continually "movin' on," as they term it, from one farm to another in a rather hopeless and aimless search for "somethin better'n we-uns hed." But to whatever farm they go, the facts and conditions of their life remain the same—a poor plot of ground, worked with few and primitive tools and for a hard taskmaster, by men and their "wimmen folks 'n chillen," who farm in the manner of the eighteenth century. In the center of their barren stretch stands the log or board cabin, often without windows and on an earthen floor. Perhaps window openings would be superfluous, for there is no lack of ventilation. Wind and rain enter through numerous chinks, followed by many of nature's small creatures. Heating and cooking are often by means of an open fireplace, though in some instances a woodstove has been added. Lighting is by lamps or from home-made rag wicks standing in a saucer of oil. Furniture is usually coarse and often home made. It is not unknown for a housewife to have only one saucepan in which to do all her cooking.

Cone pone, hog's meat and white potatoes are the main foods. Milk and butter are not a customary part of their diet. Snuff and tobacco habits are common to all—men, women and children. Among some lowlanders and many highlanders the brewing of "moonshine" is also practiced. There is an economic basis for this practice, since the small farmers in poor road sections can not manage to get their corn to the railway station or to pay the freight rates demanded, but they can transport the



modest supply of whiskey made from their corn and dispose of it at much less cost. Prohibition, of course, has given an additional impetus to moonshining. The long struggle between federal authorities and mountaineer Poor Whites over the distilling of corn whiskey has led the southern mountaineers to assume a hostile attitude toward "the govern-ment," in what they consider a righteous cause. Even those families in the community who themselves do not make moonshine will protect distillers from federal agents.

Both speech and dress distinguish Poor Whites from other elements in the population. Men and boys wear overalls or shapeless homespuns and enormous straw or felt hats, while women and girls are costumed in sunbonnets and gingham, or homespuns cut in the early and ugly fashion. Their speech is an interesting mixture of Chaucerian and Shakespearian English, with various colloquialisms which have developed out of the decades of their isolated and unlettered life. These are some examples of original phrases:

- "feisty" (gay)
- "just fixing to" (preparing)
- "reckon" (think)
- "allowed how" (estimate or plan)
- "howdy" (How do you do?)
- "up yon" (yonder)
- "ary one or tother" (either one or the other)
- "twistification" (dancing)
- "broquin' about," "cooterin' around" (investigating)
- "pretty nigh gone" (nearly exhausted)
- "right smart" (very intelligent, or, very much)
- "adopts a rheumatiz" (gets rheumatism)
- "p'intedly" (directly)
- "that thar" (that)

Old English folksongs, proverbs and dialect have been transmitted by word of mouth from generation to generation, and medieval superstitions about dreams, charms, and "bewitching" are still common.

Like most agricultural peoples, southern Poor Whites are very individualistic. Their habits of action and therefore of thought rarely extend beyond the small family group. Loyalty to family and family standards is intense. Within the family, man is master. While monogamy is the accepted standard, a child born out of wedlock is not stigmatized as in other American groups. Neither does his unmarried mother suffer as severe ostracism. There seems to be less of a double moral code. Often the woman later marries and her earlier child is accepted by her husband and raised without discrimination along with the children born of this legal union. The community may gossip, but it soon forgets. It does not eternally penalize.

Where traditional feuds exist, the habits of family loyalty are broadened to include clan loyalty and activity. Outside of the family, there is little community life and therefore almost no community feeling. Continual "movin' on" tends also to prevent development of community interests. Of the outside world, White Trash are almost totally ignorant. One evidence of this is the use of the word "foreigner" for all born outside of their mountains or valley. When asked what they would call a person born across the seas, one lanky farmer scratched his head in thought and then replied, "I reckon them's the outlandish."

However, their common economic hardships, their usually bitter experiences with creditors, their ostracism by the more well-to-do classes in the south have engendered in these "No 'Counts" a glimmering group or class consciousness. In the period from 1870 to 1890 when the price of cotton fell rapidly and many farmers lost their few acres of land, various movements of revolt, such as the Grange and the Farmers' Union, spread like wild-fire among the Poor Whites. Wall Street and the Trusts were now added to the list of farm tenants' enemies, along with the southern city aristocrats. In South Carolina in 1890 Tillman was elected governor on a "mass versus class" issue by the poorer farmers' vote. At the same time he preached the complete disen-



franchisement of the Negro and his complete suppression, utilizing the slogan "Negro race domination" for his campaign. While not as strong as the habits of individualism, there has existed since this period a tradition of group solidarity for common economic and political interests.

Practices of hospitality are very common, as with most agricultural and peasant peoples. Many of these customs can be traced back to early pioneer days. A stranger is always greeted in friendly fashion, unless there is reason to suspect him of "a-spyin' fer th' govern-ment." He is welcome to bed and board, the only payment being his news of the outside world. A family is never too poor to share what they have, even though (unknown to the stranger) it may be their last pound of corn meal. In more recent years, however, a modification of this custom has been brought about, due to the frequent abuse of this practice by outsiders, and the changing conditions brought about by commercial and transportation developments in the south. Now it is more customary to charge a small fee for such hospitality.

Religion exerts a powerful hold over this poverty-ridden people. It is primitive and highly emotional in character, and furnishes the White Trash with a means of temporary oblivion to the harsh facts of their existence. These religious services of "shoutin' Methodists" and "holiness Baptists" abound in ecstatic trances and tremors and "wreckins of the spirit," intermingled with an illiterate preacher's hysterical chanting, and singing of folk songs. These songs are usually written in a minor key and are burdened with a strange pathos and beauty. Finding this life "full of woe," Poor Whites have turned eagerly to pictures of the "after life where all is res' 'n peace." The parson's vivid descriptions of hell fire fill them with holy terror. Although unlettered, they can quote pages of scripture; and theological argument on such topics as the exact nature of heaven, hell, and sin, is a customary pastime among them.

Religion also serves as a means of controlling the social attitudes as well as the religious beliefs of these Poor Whites.

Mission schools and churches are established in the rural districts by the urban well-to-do, and "respect for law" and the social order which the city aristocrats have built up is instilled in the breasts of these independent and rebellious White Trash. Religious activities also furnish this rural people with a little recreational life. The "camp meetin'," which is held for one or two weeks each year, brings in all the families of the countryside. Between morning and afternoon service a picnic lunch is spread out on the common table, each family putting in its contribution and everyone helping himself to whatever appeals. Families visit with one another for the first time since last "protracted meetin'." Funerals likewise are social occasions. In the more remote sections of the country, where a person comes but rarely, it is not uncommon for a service over the buried to be postponed for years at a time—until the parson's next visit. Husking bees, log-rollings, square-dances (where no considered a sin), and fiddle contests are the only other forms of recreation.

While the life of Poor White farmers has always been hard, life for Negroes in the south has been even more difficult. Brought over here from Africa against their will, they were forced into slavery and made to labor like beasts in the cotton, sugar cane, and tobacco fields. Economic, political and personal rights they had none, and less than one-fifth were allowed to become literate. On their backs the plantation owners rode into great wealth and political power. Over thirty revolts of Negro slaves against slavery occurred in the south before the Civil War, but these revolts were local and spasmodic uprisings of desperate men, and were ruthlessly crushed.

The cataclysm of the Civil War destroyed the slave-holding system, but the Negroes soon found that while their status had changed from that of slaves to that of day laborers and tenant farmers, most of the evils of their former life remained, and fresh ones had developed. The land workers' burdens of poverty, landlordism and creditor-rule, child labor and illiteracy have always been especially heavy for colored folk, for the caste system presses on them at every turn. Tenancy is two and



one-half times as prevalent among Negro as among white farmers in the south, while illiteracy rates run from four to ten times as high. Various methods have been devised for keeping the colored race disfranchised. Schools open to Negro children are notoriously poor and inadequate, with five to fifteen times as much being spent on each white child by public school authorities as is spent on each colored child. These conditions of life for Negroes inevitably reflect themselves in high rates of illness and death. In South Carolina, for example, nearly thirteen per cent of Negro babies die before they reach one year of age, while the death rate of Negro women at childbirth is four times that for women in the country as a whole, and nearly eight times that in England and Japan. The death rate for the colored population in this state is forty per cent higher than that for the white.

In struggling against these conditions, Negro agricultural laborers, like their Poor White brothers, have been handicapped by their lack of understanding of the value of economic and political organization for improving their lot, and the necessity of common action of both colored and white. However, in recent years both sections have begun to organize cooperative societies. Another serious handicap for Negro people, one which they also share with "No 'Counts," is the hold which religion has over them. Colored churches exert an exceptionally conservative influence, presenting to their memberships a totally wrong slant on this subject race's problems and methods of dealing with them.

Out of their hardships and isolation, Negroes have developed a rich culture of their own. Some of their music, folklore and dances they brought with them from Africa, while much of their art dates back to slave days, or has been added since by cotton pickers, longshoremen loading cotton bales, or work gangs on the highways or along the railroads. Although most of this literature and music reflects the working class nature of their lives, only occasionally does a song or story give forth a call to the toiling and oppressed of this race to revolt against their enslavement.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### *THE MILL VILLAGE A COMPANY TOWN.*

WHEN Poor White and colored laborers come to the cotton mills to work they find that they must live in a town owned and operated by the company, and in its sole interests. Wherever cotton mill operatives go, or whatever they do, they discover the long arm of the company reaching out to dominate their thoughts and acts.

The firm which controls their jobs also owns the wooden shacks in which they live, and usually it owns the company store at which they trade. The small number of Negroes who work at the mill are not allowed to live among the white workers, but are segregated in a few huddled shacks which stand off by themselves, and their quarters and living conditions are even worse than those to which White Trash fall heir. Only a few mill workers live off the hill, for ordinarily this is impossible to manage. Employers usually make one of the conditions of the job



*Mill "houses"—some of the shacks into which the company forces its employees*



that the mill hand will move into a company house. Furthermore, wages are so low that mill hands can not afford the higher rents outside.

They learn that their children, if they attend school at all must go to a second or third-rate school, either owned directly by the company or under its control. If they are still of a religious mind and go to church, they attend in a building owned by management, and listen to a preacher who is an employee of the company and preaches only what the company is willing for him to say. If they want recreation or education, they must seek out the company-run Y. M. C. A. or community center, if there is one in the village, or go to an evening class for illiterates, or take one of the courses offered on textile subjects. Should they desire to start a club or baseball team of their own, they must get management's permission to use company land or building—a permission which can be revoked at a moment's notice.

Mill owners like to describe this relationship of theirs to their employees as one of "paternalism." According to the tradition which they foster and which city middle-class people accept uncritically, the relation is one of a benevolent but all-powerful father toward those whom he considers mere children, who must be provided for, protected, and watched over as such. Mill workers are not expected to be interested in, or capable of, assuming social responsibilities! Management explains that for all of the social services performed by mill owners for their employees, only one or two things are asked in return: Mill hands must be faithful and regular workers, and too "loyal" to the company to join a union, ask more wages, or be "movin' on" to another village. Also, they must send their children, when old enough, to the mills to work and not let them enter other trades. If this should happen, the entire family will probably be required to leave the hill altogether.

This policy of paternalism of southern mill owners intelligent workmen view as an insult to the people who work in the mills. They also see in it a shrewd attempt on the management's

part to keep the cheap, plentiful labor supply about which they boast, both cheap and plentiful, docile and stationary. Management's lack of success in this respect, they point out, proves that they have greatly underrated the stamina which labor possesses.

When company strategy of propaganda, isolation and economic pressure on their employees fail and they form unions, then management collects all its weapons of job-owner, creditor, landlord, spy system and special police powers; and discharges, evicts, denies food from the company store, arrests, blacklists and drives from its mill and company town, the offending workmen.

It is worth noting that the Southern mill village is typical in its characteristics of the thousands of company towns which are spreading like an octopus over the industrial life of the United States. In industries like coal, copper and iron mining, steel, oil and lumber, as well as textiles, capitalists have set up their privately-owned villages in which millions of American working men and women and their families live; and in all of these the companies exert an absolute dictatorship.

#### NO POLITICAL RIGHTS ON A MILL HILL

Company control of towns means that there are no political rights, as well as no economic rights, for workers on a mill hill. As the private property of the company, mill villages are not incorporated, so that as far as village matters are concerned, mill workers are disfranchised. They are denied all opportunity to mobilize and express themselves politically on local affairs, such as those of housing, sanitation, school and mill conditions, and rights of organization. There is no local government, but the owners rule through their hired staff of special deputy sheriffs and welfare workers. (Where there are exceptions to this rule, as in Bessemer City, N. C., the company usually retains its control.)

"How do we rule?" A Greenville mill president proudly boasted to an inquirer, "Like the old czars of Russia!" This is true. Czardom and paternalism go hand in hand. A mill vil-



lage is similar to a medieval feudal estate, with workmen living in industrial rather than feudal bondage. Freedom of speech, assemblage and press, and self-government are absolutely unknown.

Mill owners have bitterly fought all attempts to incorporate the villages, and thereby extend the franchise to their populations. Evidently they fear the potential political powers of their employees. Knowing that company political dictatorship makes its economic domination far easier to maintain, mill owners are determined to retain this political monopoly as long as possible. And when their autocratic policies are challenged, officials offer as an excuse, that mill village populations are not capable of governing themselves!

Political activities for the more than half million of adults who live on southern mill hills are limited therefore, at the present time, to voting in county and state elections. But in the past this voting has proven to be a farce, for textile interests are a controlling factor in county and state politics as well, and mill hands have been bandied about by the politicians of both parties. Moreover, the bulk of Negro population in the south is disfranchised altogether, through the use of various devices, such as qualification tests. The primary system of elections is also utilized for elimination of Negro voting, while the Ku Klux Klan undertakes to deal with those few colored men and women who manage to surmount the many legal difficulties placed in their way.

As part of "the solid south," those villagers who vote at all usually vote Democratic, but there are a number of Republicans among descendants of the mountaineer Poor Whites. The feeling worked up around election times sometimes becomes intense, leading to bitter quarrels and street fights. One customary method of starting trouble is for a Democrat mill worker to call after a Republican, "there goes a nigger vote." During election campaigns, politicians of both parties manoeuvre to "line up" mill village votes for their candidates. According to workers' stories, before elections they are treated and flattered, and various promises are made them of what the candidates will

do for working people, if elected. In some cases petty bribery is used, the politicians paying from one to five dollars for each voter a villager carries to the polls, and automobiles are furnished so as to make it easier for the prospective voters to exercise their "rights of citizenship." "Voting" in the mills with the ballots and ballot boxes supervised by superintendents and foremen is not uncommon.

"And after elections, we're no more'n dirt to 'em, 'til nex' election rolls around," one woman complained. "I tole my husband I warnt agoin' no more. What's th' use? It doan do no good." Many others expressed a similar disgust with these election practices of American democracy. A general disillusion has grown up among mill hands concerning the power of the ballot in "poo' folks' hands," so long as mill interests control the only parties in the field, while only a few as yet realize the power of labor as an independent political force.

Mill workers are naturally dissatisfied with the conditions of village life, and are quite ready to state the changes which need to be made, before anything resembling a healthy community can be built up around southern cotton mills. All agree that higher wages and shorter hours are the first changes which are necessary, so as to raise the general standard of living on the mill hills and give the workers more free time in which to develop their social activities. More than half of the hundreds of mill hands with whom we talked emphasized the fact that establishment of unions on cotton mill hills was the one method for securing these better conditions. Further, unionism would protect operatives against company tyranny, and be the first step toward the establishment of economic and political self-government on mill hills. So long as the villages remain the private property of mill owners, conditions there will be dictated by the companies and the many needed improvements will not be made. For the companies care nothing about the welfare of villagers, but are only interested in the profits to be made out of them. Therefore it is of prime importance that industrial and political control be wrested out of the hands of the companies and be placed



in the hands of those who know and care about village life—that is, in the hands of those who must live and work there.

#### THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH.

Village churches are one of the most effective means of company propaganda. Poor White and Negro labor is traditionally religious, and management has utilized this fact to its own advantage. Every village, with rare exceptions, has one or more company-owned churches and company-employed pastors. From one-half to two-thirds of the villagers, in the places where we worked, attended Sunday church services regularly, for this is one of the few diversions and social gatherings which life on the hill offers.

There are few mill workers' families who are actively engaged in church affairs, however. Church leadership depends primarily on the minister and his family, aided by social workers, teachers, and mill superintendents and foremen and their wives. Like their forefathers, mill villagers are largely Baptists and Methodists and the gospel they hear preached is "the good old religion of soul-saving and repentance," of exhortation to meek endurance of this world's hardships with faith in the reward hereafter in a heaven of peace and glory, combined with continual warnings to the wicked and unbelieving that eternal damnation in a hell of fire and brimstone shall be their fate. It is a theological and irrational doctrine, emotionally preached and emotionally accepted. Superstitious beliefs are commonly accepted, about god's interference in a most minute way, in human affairs, either to incite or to prevent some act, or to reward or punish some individual's or group's conduct. Accidents, coincidences, illness and happenings in nature are frequently interpreted as "signs from heaven." The social doctrines which the pastors promote are extremely reactionary, including eulogies of the family as the basis of christian civilization and laments on its signs of decay, acceptance of things as they are as right and inevitable and part of god's will, and the necessity of being faithful and appreciative workmen. Mill preachers do not concern

themselves with the significance, from a social and "Christian point of view," of child labor, long hours, low standard of living and the denial of the right to form unions. They keep silent on these matters altogether, or mention them only to denounce the "reds" who would upset the peace and harmony which is supposed to exist on southern cotton mill hills. The rare minister who has favored some social reform has been quickly removed from his post.

Of four ministers whom I ran across in the villages, all had nothing but praise for what the textile industry and its benevolent owners had done for southern labor; and all referred to mill workers as shiftless and generally irresponsible! Two of them thought, however, that mill people had some latent powers of leadership. One pastor ardently defended child labor, saying that mill people's children were healthier and happier in the mills than when running the streets and eating candy. He also stated that there was not a family in the village which could not have everything it needed (although many families had only nine dollars a week on which to live), except for the foolish waste of money on ginger ale and such. He was in close contact with management and much opposed to unionism. Another pastor stated that conditions were far better now than some years ago, in fact just about all that could be desired, and that past changes had been brought about by management for its people, and that in good time it would further improve conditions, should such be needed! A third preacher referred to the low standard of living of village people but seemed to consider it due largely to their shiftlessness, and he also said he was opposed to unionism. The fourth man had but one plank in his social platform, beside religion: he wished to see mill people take up farming on the side as a health and income aid. All four stressed the necessity of spiritual rejuvenation and their mission as reconcilers of capital and labor, and of town and village. What they said was merely a repetition of the content of speeches made by the main spokesmen at summer conferences of Southern Baptist and Methodist ministers, published in handsome book form by



the Manufacturers' Record, a notorious open-shop organ, and presented gratis to all the local pastors for their edification.

These "Christian" organizations and social doctrines, which are quite acceptable to management, have had a most decided effect on mill people's point of view. For instance, in discussing their living and working conditions and unionism as an attempt to remedy their grievances, a number of workers made some such statements as, "We mustn't concern ourselves with earthly things. It is all in God's hands," or "Unionism might be a good thing but I ain't got no time, my thoughts is all on the world to come." One woman, after a recital of fifty years of poverty's hardships, ended with the words, "But for my belief in God and His Goodness and His reward hereafter, I couldn't go on." Some also stated themselves as opposed to unionism and gave as their reasons that unionism would prevent owners and employers from acting as christian brothers and quoted the bible as proving god of this opinion! Of course, many more mill workers quoted scripture to prove god's approval of unionism! Needless to say, this interpretation of the matter they had not received from the church but had worked out for themselves, to justify their stand.

While mill villagers are still a very religious people, there are some indications that religious activities are playing less of a role among them than formerly. In transferring from agricultural to industrial life, many religious practices have been abandoned, and a smaller proportion belong to church than belonged in rural days.

COMPARISON OF THE EXTENT OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IN THE MOUNTAIN REGIONS OF NORTH AND SOUTH CAROLINAS WITH ITS EXTENT IN FIVE CAROLINA MILL VILLAGES.

(Given in percentages, and including only those above nine years of age)<sup>1</sup>

Locality	Proportion of Population who are:	
	Church Members	Not Church Members
Mountainous Regions of North		
North and South Carolina	69	31
Carolina Mill Villages	58	42

<sup>1</sup> Figures on mountainous regions are adapted from Campbell's "The Southern Highlander and His Homeland," p. 371.

Among the village populations, the younger generation is less apt to join church, more irregular in attendance and less orthodox in its point of view, than its elders, although the teen-agers often use a Young People's Society as a social center.

The reasons for this lessening hold of the church over village populations are many, including the break-up of church-going habits through villagers' continual moving from place to place; the decrease in illiteracy and growing sophistication especially among the young people, the tempting opportunities to violate some of the religious taboos on the city's attractions of movies, theatres, dancing and mixed swimming parties; and the development of other organizations which can meet their emotional and social needs, such as lodges, clubs, athletic societies and unions. The most fundamental factor at work is the growing feeling on the part of mill workers that the church is not only not fulfilling any useful, practical purposes in their lives and offers no real help in the problems of daily work and life which they as mill workers must face, but also that the village pastor and the village church are really a part of the company's machinery for controlling their actions and thoughts. This feeling has become definite conviction when, in times of union agitation and strikes, they have found pastors siding with the company and serving to undermine labor's solidarity. No doubt as unionism and class-consciousness grow on the hill, mill hands will emancipate themselves more and more from the reactionary influences of the company church.

VILLAGE SCHOOLS AND COMPANY WELFARE WORK

Village schools are established on the principle that mill hands' children will also grow up to be mill hands, and the school's job therefore is to fit them for their future work. In both content and extent, the school curriculum is geared to this end.

In the early days of mill development, many companies built a grammar school in each village, hiring the teachers and paying all expenses. At the beginning, little attention had been paid to the question of education for mill hands' children, but management soon discovered that a machine operator who could not read,



write and do simple problems of arithmetic was a business handicap. In general, managements preferred to build and control these schools, rather than have to deal with outside interference and school taxation problems. In most of the southern states, as in South Carolina, the majority of village children still go to such company-owned schools. There is one outstanding exception to this rule, that of the Parker District surrounding Greenville, S. C., but company influence still predominates here as well. In North Carolina only one fourth of the 119 schools for village children are now owned by mill companies, but company control is maintained by the practice of mill officials serving on school boards and, in a few cases, acting as superintendents. In this way the schools are doubly secured as an agency of company propaganda.

The amount of education which mill villagers receive is meager. Those above fourteen years of age have had, usually, three years of schooling, while only one-fourth have gone beyond the fifth grade. Nearly one-fifth of them are illiterate. This rate of illiteracy is extremely high, being two to three times the rates for the southern population as a whole. The younger generation is receiving slightly more schooling than their elders did, nevertheless approximately twenty per cent of North Carolina's mill village children between seven and fourteen years of age were not in school in 1925 (Cook, "Mill Village School of North Carolina," p. 109). The situation was certainly no better in the other mill states and was probably much worse. This rate of non-attendance is just twice that for the country as a whole.

Mill workers' poverty is at the basis of this non-attendance. The rates of illness among both young and old are high, due to malnutrition, exposure through lack of sufficient clothing, and poor sanitary conditions in the village. Also many children below working age are kept at home to assume duties there while their parents are at work, while others are in the mill, having been granted "special" working permits. There are almost no means of enforcement of compulsory attendance laws in mill village districts. Local teachers consider the mobility of village popula-

tions an important factor, affecting both attendance and achievement at school. Each Monday morning a new class roll has to be made, and it is not uncommon for the entire membership of a grade to be changed by the end of a quarter. In addition, the poorly trained teachers, working with meager equipment and limited program, fail to arouse in either children or parents any marked enthusiasm for school work. Here again, race discrimination is practiced, and the schools into which the colored children are segregated are notoriously bad.

All but a small fraction of village children leave school the day they are fourteen (if they have not left before): a practice prompted by the necessity of earning a living. About three-fourths of the parents and children expressed their unrealized desire for more education. Another difficulty in the way of village youth seeking "higher education," beyond the age of fourteen years, is the general failure of village schools to offer more than a six or seven year course. Company purposes are met when its prospective mill hands have had 3 or 4 years of schooling. Those few who continue into high school must travel long distances and pay part of their tuition. In those few districts where village youth have better opportunities for a high school education school records show an increasing number of pupils continuing on into high school. But this tendency is necessarily a slight one, since economic factors still operate to force children from school into the mills, and the schools and social environment, on the other hand, offer little incentive to youth to continue on. Such vocational training as there is, is generally limited to training in textiles, so that the few mill workers' children who complete high school usually enter the mill along with the fourth-graders, receive the same rates of pay, and live under the same conditions. So, mill workers reason, what has been accomplished by all the years of sacrifice? As they express it, "Ejication (of this kind) ain't fer us mill hands, but fer them what's goin' to make some-thun of theirselves,"—in other words, for those who are training to become business or professional men. Although they are unfamiliar with working class education and its social philosophy,



they nevertheless sense the fact that mill people need education of another kind, one which will not merely teach them the technical aspects of their trade but will also give a training and outlook that will enable them to improve their standard of living and enrich their lives. Once mill workers have established their own organizations, they will undoubtedly undertake to build up such an educational movement among themselves.

The village school system offers practically no opportunity to adults for participation in its activities. No village has any responsible relationship to the school system. As a non-taxpaying and unincorporated community, it has no power to elect the school board which directs local school affairs. Such a board is selected by the company and composed largely of its officials, or, if it is a county-owned school, the county administration appoints the board. In the Parker District near Greenville, S. C., a change from this older system was inaugurated a few years ago, so that the school board of this mill district is now elected by the village populations. At first the mill owners opposed this change, but they agreed as soon as they understood that mill officials would still compose the school board.

Each local school has, or attempts to have, a Parent-Teacher Association. This organization is supposed to interest parents in the educational policies and functioning of the school which their children attend, but in practice the P. T. A. limits itself to the task of raising funds for a school piano or new curtains. Except for the teachers, who feel an obligation to attend, the only members are wives of the two pastors, and of one or two company foremen or higher officials. Mill employees do not belong or attend. When a P. T. A. is having a sale or social, donations are solicited from house to house, and then mill workers are called on to contribute a pound of tea or sugar, but this is usually their sole connection with the P. T. A. Its meetings are often held in the afternoon when those at work in the mill cannot attend, even if they wished to do so, and mill villagers generally feel the class distinction drawn between themselves and mill officials and their wives, and do not wish to mingle with them. "They doan wan'

us to jine," one woman stated; "that's fer bosses' wives, that ain't fer us." Another said, "I ain't got th money to dress fit to go nowhere. They'd look at me funny." "They (the officials) can build a bridge on my nose but not walk acrost it," another mill worker said proudly, when discussing why she stayed away. Others related experiences which they considered proved that they were not wanted in the P. T. A. "Two of us went and when th' teacher called the roll, she forgot to mention our names, so we knew we warnt wanted, 'n we never went back."

Some village schools offer one or two evening classes in textile subjects, and opportunities to learn to read and write, and



*The library-on-wheels comes to a few villages, but it brings no labor books*

many mill workers seize eagerly upon this chance to become literate.

Reading matter available to mill villagers is both scant in quantity and poor in quality. There are no libraries on the hills, and mill workers cannot afford to buy books, not having sufficient income to buy food and clothing. Also most families find sub-



scription to a daily newspaper beyond their reach, but often one paper is passed around among two or three families. These local sheets are typical small-town and rural affairs, featuring local "society" news, crime and divorce cases, boosts for Democratic politicians, religious notes, praises of southern textile owners and what they have done for workers and the community in general, and editorials setting forth the southern, middle-class, Anglo-Saxon version of the universe. Their opposition to unionism is universal, and in times of organization efforts and strikes, they openly align themselves with management and heap abuse upon the disloyal workmen!

A few village districts, as that surrounding Greenville, S. C., receive visits each week from a library-on-wheels which is sent out from the neighboring city. But the books offered consist only of popular fiction and children's stories. There are no economic and sociological books at all, or books dealing with labor and political topics. Sometimes there are a few books on mechanical and popular science topics, because of calls for these from the villagers. Among the men, western and detective stories are popular, while stories of "love and adventure" are much read by both men and women.

Another agency of company propaganda, in addition to those of church, school and press, is that of company welfare work. Quite a number of mill corporations do not feel it necessary to add this extra feature, but often the mills employ one or more social workers to organize clubs for young people and "look out for the welfare" of employees.

In some cases there is an elaborate program developed, with community center, gymnasium and swimming pool. The purpose of these clubs is to make employees more satisfied and loyal workmen, and thus cut down on the high rates of labor turnover and lessen their interest in forming unions. Often a company-subsidized Y.M.C.A. takes charge of such activities. In no case do the clubs function in any truly democratic fashion, but everything is planned and "put over" by the paid social workers who are in charge.

Participation of villagers in these company recreational efforts varies considerably from village to village, but in the places where we were, less than a fifth of them took any part. About two-thirds expressed unfavorable opinions of welfare work, while others commented favorably on specific activities, such as medical care, home economic courses, and recreational activities for the youth. Mill villagers are proud and independent, and resent any form of obvious paternalism, especially of the type which clearly aims to "improve" them. Also they feel that the company has some ulterior purposes to serve, that "they doan spend money for nothin'," and that the money spent on welfare work could be much better used in paying higher wages.

Autocratic paternalism, in all of its varied phases, is designed to further one end. Ownership of village and control of church, school and reading matter are means which the owners use for holding workers in material and mental subjection to the southern mill system of low wages and long hours. Back of the system of paternalism lies economic exploitation.





# CHAPTER V.

## ECONOMIC LIFE AND SOCIAL STATUS OF DIXIE MILL HANDS.

There are few but mill hands on a mill hill. The companies see to this. Also, only those, whose work at the mill makes it necessary to live in the village, would do so. Occupational experience of villagers is limited, with rare exceptions, to farming and mill life. Approximately one half of villagers are second or third generation mill workers, while the others are fresh recruits from the lowland and mountain farms.

A child born on a mill hill has little choice of a career before him. The chances are nine to one that he will go into a cotton mill. He may become a dirt farmer or agricultural laborer, but Poor Whites and Negroes both know this to be a poor alternative. If the child is a girl the chances are 99 to 1 that she will work in the mill or marry a mill hand, or both. In talking with approximately 385 mill families living in five Carolina mill villages, these are the facts which came to light:

### OCCUPATIONS OF POPULATION FOURTEEN YEARS OF AGE AND ABOVE, IN FIVE CAROLINA MILL VILLAGES.

Village	Percentage Engaged in:						
	Men			Women			
	Millwork	Other	Total	Millwork	Housework	Other	Total
"A"	95	5	100	61	36	03	100
"B"	87	13	100	44	56	0	100
"C"	90	10	100	56	41	3	100
"D"	94	6	100	56	45	1	100
"E"	97	3	100	50	50	0	100
Average	93	7	100	52.2	46.4	1.4	100

While mill hands find it hard to leave the trade altogether, they can move from village to village, looking for a better break. Southern mill owners have never been able to curb labor turnover to their satisfaction. A moving van is a common sight in a mill village. These textile workers, like rural forebears, take their

# SOUTHERN COTTON MILLS AND LABOR

dissatisfaction out in restless roaming about. This is a common but unfruitful method which unorganized and underpaid workmen use everywhere, until they learn that the real way to accomplish improvements for themselves is through their organized efforts.

Nearly one-half of the mill families with whom we came in contact had been staying in the village where they now lived, two years or less. Almost two-thirds of them had been in town less than five years, and only one-eighth had been there as long as fifteen years.

### LENGTH OF RESIDENCE IN VILLAGE BY FAMILIES, IN FIVE CAROLINA MILL VILLAGES

Length of residence (years)	Villages				Average of Five Villages	
	A	B	C	D		
0-4 .....	48	39	65	53	85	58
5-9 .....	25	43	15	23	8	23
10-14 .....	9	9	8	8	3	7
15-19 .....	9	6	9	8	2	7
20-24 .....	9	3	2	8	2	5
Total .....	100	100	100	100	100	100

### Percentages given in culminative form

0-4 .....	48	39	66	53	85	58
0-9 .....	73	82	81	76	93	81
0-14 .....	82	91	89	84	96	88
0-19 .....	91	97	98	92	98	95
0-24 .....	100	100	100	100	100	100

A recent study on "Lost Time and Labor Turnover in Cotton Mills" by the U. S. Bureau of Women in Industry, revealed that the time lost by workers trying for jobs for short periods in other mills comprises nearly three times as great a percent of absence in the South as in the North. The rate for the South was 10.2 per cent, and for the North, 3.9 per cent. Southern mill operatives are even more dissatisfied than their northern fellow-workers, because of lower wage rates, lack of union rights, company ownership of villages, and the greater stigma on mill work in the South. With increased earnings a marked tendency develops to remain in one place longer.

Wages earned by southern mill workers are low and their



hours long. South Carolina law allows mills to work an eleven hour day and a fifty-five hour week, while North Carolina permits a sixty hour week. Most mills run the maximum number of hours, while overtime in busy periods is widely practiced. In some villages men told me of working seventy-two hours a week. Many mills work day and night shifts. The lower wages and longer hours prevailing in southern mills, as compared with the forty-eight hour week and wage rates current in northern mills, accounts for the shift of the textile industry southward. The average yearly wage for all textile workers in South Carolina for 1919 was \$756.73, for North Carolina \$730.12, and for Massachusetts \$897.17 (U. S. Fourteenth Census, Volume VIII). The 1925 Biennial Census of Manufacturers showed the average wage of cotton goods workers in South Carolina to be \$631.38; for North \$640.17; for Massachusetts, \$954.00, and for the United States as a whole, \$806.39. The southern mill owners have objected to this comparison of money wages of northern and southern textile workers, on the basis that it does not take into account the differences in cost of living of the two mill groups, but their objections have been proven invalid. A study by the National Industrial Conference Board, a manufacturers' organization, of the comparative cost of living in northern and southern textile towns, revealed the fact that cost of living in the southern districts is actually higher than that in the North, lower rents in the South being more than offset by higher food prices there. Studies show that \$1,510.00 is the minimum amount on which a family of five can live in the Carolinas—about two and one-half times the actual amount earned by a mill worker there. Differences in wages and hours cannot be explained away in terms of cost of living, but are due to the pressure of union demands and social legislation in the northern region, and the relative lack of this pressure in southern territory.

During the six-year period, from 1919 to 1925, Carolina mill workers had their earnings reduced by nearly one-fifth, while the discrepancy between the earnings of northern and southern textile workers more than doubled. Deductions from the latest

figures of the Census of Manufactures for 1927 show that southern cotton mill workers have weekly earnings of \$12.83, a little more than one-half of the average wage in American industry.

Government figures show that mill workers below the Mason and Dixon line get from three to five dollars less a week on an operation than workers in other parts of the country.

COMPARISONS ON WAGES OF VARIOUS CRAFT GROUPS OF COTTON MILL WORKERS OF NORTH AND SOUTH CAROLINA AND THE ENTIRE UNITED STATES <sup>1</sup>

Operation	AVERAGE WEEKLY WAGE					
	South Carolina		North Carolina		Entire United States	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Picker tenders .....	\$13.81	.....	\$14.70	.....	\$16.07	.....
Card tenders .....	13.42	.....	15.48	.....	17.42	.....
Speeder tenders .....	16.17	\$14.69	18.65	\$16.77	18.90	\$18.77
Spinners .....	11.39	11.72	9.22	12.88	15.92	15.09
Slasher tenders .....	15.40	.....	19.70	.....	21.91	.....
Loom fixers .....	20.85	.....	22.89	.....	26.16	.....
Weavers .....	17.27	15.18	19.63	17.54	21.07	19.46

In the last year the *stretch-out* system has been introduced into southern mills, whereby each worker is required to handle more looms, or spools, etc., and the rate on each operation has been lowered until workers find it impossible to maintain their former wage level, even though they are speeding up at a terrific rate. For example, one worker reported that his wages had been cut from \$25.00 to \$11.00, and his work increased from eight sides to sixteen. Another, who used to operate twenty-four looms for \$19.00, now operates seventy-two for \$21.00. These schemes of rationalization, together with the falling wages and long hours have lead to a series of revolts in the southern industry within recent months.

While in southern mills men and women are usually paid an identical rate for the same work, there are few operations equally open to men and women, and on those operations which are primarily "women's jobs" the rate is far lower than on those performed by men. This condition prevails regardless of the relative skill of the operation. For example, "drawin' in," a highly skilled

<sup>1</sup> *Wages and Hours in Cotton Goods Industry, 1924-1926, Monthly Labor Review, Feb. 1927, p. 53.*



process performed wholly by women, is poorly paid. Negro workmen also are discriminated against. Colored men and women are not employed at the machines, except in rare instances, but clean the cotton and do manual work around the mill, and for this they receive miserable pay. A government study on Negro Women in Industry shows that the average earnings of colored women in textile mills range from four to six dollars a week.

Because of the practice of sex discrimination in wages, mill employers are especially keen on having white women in the mills. In the cotton-growing states, in 1919, women compose 36 percent of the total textile wage-earning group. About forty percent of these are married women. This is a much higher rate than that for all American industries, which is 24.5 percent. As soon as children reach working age, fourteen years, they also enter the mill. Child labor below the age of fourteen is not as common as it formerly was, although it is still prevalent. The 1920 Census report six percent of North Carolina's textile workers as below the age of sixteen, and six and three-tenths of South Carolina's mill force, with approximately 7,500 child laborers in cotton mills in the southern states. How many of these child laborers are below fourteen years of age is not certain, but the number of special working permits to children below the minimum working age is notoriously high, especially in South Carolina and Georgia mills. Also the laws against child labor are poorly enforced in many sections, so that altogether the figures on the amount of children at work in southern cotton mills are probably understatement of the actual situation. Yet the workers' grim determination to keep their children out of the mills as long as possible, and to give them at least a minimum of education, has had its effect. Due to workers' agitation and struggles, such laws as there are restricting child labor have been placed on the statute books. Also the companies wish literate workmen and this means that children must be free to go to school for a few terms. There is another type of child labor described in the first chapter, where the oldest child below fourteen years stays at home to keep house and mind the younger children while both parents work in the

mill. There is an unintentional irony in the mill owners' proud statement that the southern textile industry is "a family industry." For the fact of the matter is, that conditions of southern mill life are rapidly destroying family organization among mill workers. In agricultural days the family formed the basic economic and social unit, but modern industry has removed these older bases of family life, and also has brought many new conditions, such as mothers in industry, factory child labor, families divided between day and night shifts, and the unstabilizing effects of urban life.

While southern mill work is largely non-seasonal in character, Dixie mill hands lose more time from work than northern operatives. The latter lost 13.2 percent of their working time in 1924, while southern operatives lost 23.3 percent. The "spare hand system," whereby each mill keeps approximately fifteen percent more help than it actually needs in order to fill all possible vacancies, cuts down on the time worked by southern operatives, for if the spare hand does not get sufficient work to support himself, regular workers are asked to remain out a few days so that the spare hand may work! One fourth of lost time was due to the mill "runnin' low" or closing down for a brief period; and the remaining fourth was due to ill health.<sup>1</sup> Southern mill workers, due to their long hours of work, the heat and moisture in the mills, and their impoverished standard of living, are subject to many epidemics and other diseases. Both birth and death rates are higher and the span of life shorter than those for the total population of the United States.

COMPARISON OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION BY AGE GROUPS, OF FIVE CAROLINA MILL VILLAGES AND THE ENTIRE UNITED STATES.

Age Groups	(Given in Percentages)	
	Carolina Villages	Total U. S.
0-9 years	32	22
10-19 "	23	18
20-29 "	20	18
30-39 "	12	15
40-49 "	8	12
50-59 "	4	7
60-69 "	1	8

<sup>1</sup> "Lost Time and Labor Turnover in Cotton Mills," by U. S. Bureau of Women in Industry, *passim*.



Pellagra, a disease which springs from malnutrition and attacks not only the body but finally the brain as well, is very common in southern cotton mills. A study made of the ravages of this sickness among southern workers by the U. S. Bureau of Health showed very clearly the relationship between the workers' poverty and the illness, for it was the lack of means with which to buy milk, eggs, fresh fruit and vegetables, (especially in the winter months) which gave rise to a physical condition leading to the dread disease. The lower the amount of earnings, the higher the rate of sickness in a family. Tuberculosis is also common among cotton mill workers, due to their malnutrition and weakened condition from mill work. Unsanitary living conditions make an epidemic of typhoid each summer a matter of course.

In the face of low wages, any illness or unemployment brings immediate disaster; yet there are no forms of social insurance in the cotton mill states against unemployment, old age dependency, or occupational diseases; maternity benefits are unknown, and the systems of workmen's compensation, in the few states which have them, are miserably inadequate.

Southern mill hands are a poverty-stricken and propertyless group. Their rented homes are furnished with a most meagre equipment which has usually been purchased from a "loan shark" on the five-dollar-down—one-dollar-a-week basis. The loan shark is an acknowledged institution in the village, making his profit out of the frequent reclaimings of furniture he is able to make from his debtors who cannot meet some of the weekly payments. He lives upon the workers' misfortune. In cases of default, mill families have been known to be left without a scrap of furniture in the house. One case I remember of a sick person being left to lie on the bare floor. When the neighbors hear of a family's misfortune they dig down into their overalls or aprons and pennies are scraped together; or charity workers or mill management make the necessary five dollar loan against future wages, and another loan shark is called in to refurnish the shack complete on the five-dollar-down—one-dollar-a-week basis.

Being in debt and living on credit are an inescapable part of

life on a hill. Clothes, household furnishings, and an occasional piano or Ford are purchased on this long time credit basis. Likewise groceries are advanced at the company store, next week's wages serving as security.

Living within the four-room shacks is crowded, and adjusted to the lack of water, heating systems, and other conveniences. Complaints become bitter when houses leak or bugs and ants become unbearable. Yet in spite of all difficulties many families adhere to certain standards of cleanliness which demand strenuous efforts on their part in order to be maintained. There is a rather widespread practice of supplementing wages by a little farming, either on small patches of ground back of their house, or on a piece of company land at the edge of the village set aside for this purpose. Communal practices in the cultivation and distribution of these gardens' products are also common. The typical dress of mill workers reflects both their rural past and their present necessity. Children run about in a one-piece, nondescript garment. During the week men wear overalls, shapeless felt or straw hats



*Gastonia strikers' children, already active in the class struggle*



and heavy shoes, girls and women dress in faded gingham slips or black and white checkered percales, with the traditional sun-bonnet serving as protection from the hot southern sun. On Sunday, or for parties or funerals, this everyday garb is discarded by all those who have a "Sunday best" suit or dress. Especially the young girls, stimulated by what they have seen in city store-windows and worn by city women folk, strive to own a dress of slazy silk or satin. Many men purchase a cheap black, or dark blue suit, white collar and shirt, and a large white bow tie. To quote another villager, "Us mill folks is too poor to dress nice and eat good too. You hev to choose one or 'tother. Some of the young gals puts all they earn on their backs, but me, honey, I likes my vittles the best. This here 'un is the only dress I got but we eats decent."

By moving from farm to mill, these Poor Whites may have improved their standard of living somewhat (although the extent of this improvement has been much exaggerated by mill apologists), but their general economic and social status has remained much the same. Many mill workers feel their present position to be even inferior to their former one as small farmers. They are still Poor Whites—ostracized and looked down upon by their "betters." Their economic condition, coupled with their enforced ignorance and backwardness, has determined their low social status. Only the Negroes are looked upon as having an inferior position in modern southern society. As yet, not many see that in reality, all mill workers and other laborers, both white and colored, are now members of one class, that of wage-earners, who are forced to work for the owners of industry, in order to make a living; and that, since these owners exploit the workers for their own personal gain, it is to the interests of wage-earners to unite in a common struggle against them for their rights. In this respect the transfer from agricultural to industrial life has meant a real gain for Poor White and Negro labor, for while scattered around on the farms it was hard for them to recognize their common problems and to organize for common aims, but when massed

in mills and towns they soon begin to realize the necessity and possibilities of united action.

Their present unenviable position is recognized both by other sections of the population and by mill workers themselves. There is a stigma to being a "mill hand" or "mill bat" or "lint head," and to living on a mill "hill." Mill workers know that skilled workmen in the city, tradesmen and professionals feel a great social gulf between themselves and mill villagers, while the banking and owning class treat them with open contempt. Only the small farmers and other low-paid groups of wage-earners and organized labor will mingle and work with mill hands as equals. And even here the race line is usually drawn, Poor Whites mixing only with Poor Whites and Negroes only with Negroes.

Mill workers, for their part, resent their general economic and social position and the attitude of other more fortunate groups toward them. They can not accept their present lot, but neither have they been able to change it as yet, according to their wishes. Their activities and conversation show them to be restless and dissatisfied. A small part of their discontent is due to an imperfect adjustment of a former agricultural and individualistic people to modern industrial and town life, with its demands on cooperative activity and submergence of the individual in the group. But there are more permanent elements of conflict in mill village life, such as the mill workers' subjection to the mill owners' exploiting system, and the poverty, ill health, company ownership of village and homes which this system involves, and also the fact that "mill hands' chillun gotta be mill hands too." This statement, in varying forms, was made again and again.

Yet, southern mill workers are emphatically opposed to their children entering the mills. They give as their reasons, "Once a mill hand, always a mill hand," "A mill-hand's got no chauct," "Th' mill takes everything out of a body 'n don't pay nothin', noway." Nearly three-fifths of the parents stated their definite opposition to mill work but of these only a few had any real hope of being able to train their youth for other trades. One-fifth said they did not wish their children to become mill workers but added,



"What else kin they be?"; while barely one-ninth thought mill work was a good steady trade, and were willing to see their children enter it, when old enough. Others, when asked, about plans for their offspring, merely shook their heads and said, "I jes' doan know."

Over three-fourths of the southern textile workers with whom we talked are dissatisfied with their present lot, and of these one-third have formulated a class philosophy of the reasons for their plight and methods of dealing with their problems. Until recently they have had little contact with the revolutionary working class movement, but the logic of their position has taught them a homely kind of socialism. They refer to themselves as "Us poor people," and over one-half of those with whom we came in contact made statements about the necessity of unionism, and "Us working class of people stickin' together." Scripture is quoted, decrying the rich and upholding the poor, and bitter remarks are made about the mill owners getting rich at the workers' expense. The experiences of southern mill workers have prepared them for militant methods and revolutionary doctrines, and they have received the Communist and left wing movement, which has recently begun an intensive campaign in the South, with enthusiasm.

There is one phase of the revolutionary program which southern labor finds itself less prepared to accept, as it runs contrary to its prejudices. This is the platform of united efforts of colored and white workers, on an equal footing, and their common struggle for full economic, political and social equality for all workers, regardless of race. The color line has been drawn taut in the South for over a century and a half, and generations of race hatred and race fear must be broken down before Negro and white labor can fully understand one another. White workers have been so misled by propaganda of the business-controlled press, schools and churches that they actually believe that the Negro is at the basis of much of their trouble! They blame the Negro, though wrongly, for their double predicament, first as farming Poor Whites and now as millhands, who have been forced off the land into the mills. Fearing that they will be forced



*The coming of the N. T. W. to the South marks the beginning of interracial class solidarity in Dixie*

to even lower depths through having to compete with Negroes in the mills, white operatives are insistent upon their "rights as white men" to a monopoly on the jobs at the machines, and on the recognition of their superior caste. This attitude of Anglo-Saxon superiority has received encouragement from management. Mill owners find white labor so cheap and so plentiful and profits sufficiently large so that there is no need to use Negro labor as mill operatives, although the threat of doing so has proven a useful way of keeping the two groups apart and stemming their revolts. Negro labor is naturally suspicious of white workers, for they



have often suffered at their hands, and they feel dubious of white labor's sincerity in this recent move. It sounds too good to be true! A Negro organizer who had come South to aid in unionizing colored along with white mill workers was warned by those of his race, "Best keep away from them white trash, for they doan mean you any good." But the protection which mill hands gave this colored organizer from a Ku-Klux-Klan mob helped to break down these Negro workers' mistrust. This is one instance which shows that southern textile workers, organized into one union, are learning through their industrial struggles the common economic lot of white and colored wage-earners, and the necessity of common action. At the same time, the new social outlook gained through contact with the Labor Movement is freeing them from their former prejudices.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### UNIONISM IN SOUTHERN TEXTILES

DISCONTENT of mill workers with their lot has been seeking active outlet. Recognizing their position as wage-earners, they have begun to act accordingly. Ever since the textile industry has been well established in the south, there have been intermittent union campaigns there. Usually these organizing efforts have been initiated by spontaneous strike movements among southern textile workers, with a national union then coming into the field. In consequence, union efforts have often been rather sporadic and poorly organized. Also company opposition has been ruthless. Nevertheless, in nearly one half of a century of struggles, this section of the American working class has shown itself capable of a courage, sacrifice, leadership and endurance that speaks well for the determination of southern mill hands to conquer all difficulties and build their union movement.

The first union efforts began in the late eighties, when the

Knights of Labor led a few strikes in Carolina and Georgia cotton mills. But these strikes were insufficiently organized, local in character, and occurred at a period when the Knights of Labor was in too weakened a condition to give adequate support. In 1891 the National Union of Textile Workers was formed, with a large membership, both North and South. Its outlook was definitely socialistic. Affiliation to the American Federation of Labor was soon effected. The forty southern locals with their many thousands of members took an active part in this new industrial union. A Georgia operative was elected president. Organization was pushed, and many strikes occurred to enforce demands relating to union recognition, higher wages, a ten hour day and improved working conditions. The A. F. of L. was appealed to, but little aid was forthcoming. For example, in 1900, the National Union of Textile Workers' representatives to the A. F. of L. convention reported on the deplorable labor conditions existing in the South and the mill workers' willingness to struggle for improvements and union recognition. Strikes were then in progress in Augusta, Georgia, and various other centers. Although a resolution was passed by the convention calling for organization work in the South, the only practical action taken was appointment of two organizers to aid the textile union in this field, and a paltry sum of five hundred dollars appropriated.

In 1901 the National Union of Textile Workers was merged with the United Textile Workers, a new organization fathered by the A. F. of L. executive and controlled by unambitious craft bodies. Evidently the influence of the southern militant section was eliminated by this reorganization, for the record shows that *at this time all outside support was withdrawn from the southern mill workers*, and they were left to struggle alone for better conditions.<sup>1</sup> With the companies using all the weapons at their disposal against the strikers, the southern branch of the union virtually disappeared in a series of harsh defeats. From this period until 1914 the record of the U. T. W. in the south was

<sup>1</sup> Mitchell, George, "The Cotton Mills Again," Survey, July 15, 1927, pp. 411-413.



one of repeated failures. Periodically, southern mill hands, goaded beyond endurance, would plunge into struggles, and appeal to the U. T. W. for aid. A charter would be granted, dues collected—and the workers, given little or no organizational and financial aid, would find themselves within a few months again without an organization and conditions unbearable. The company fired local union leaders, discriminated against union members and drove them from the village. This story repeated itself again and again. Seven or eight locals were created each year during this decade, only to disappear. The union national executive formulated no general program of organization in the south, nor in the country as a whole. Neither did the executive make any effort to spread the unionizing campaigns initiated by southern workers over a wider area. A branch office of the union was kept in Charlotte, N. C., during part of this period, but its activities consisted mainly in filling out charter forms for local groups of workmen demanding them, and handling dues stamps. Evidently the U. T. W. felt no interest in southern textile operatives, for they were too poorly paid to be much of a financial asset to the union. The U. T. W.'s constituent craft bodies catered to New England skilled operatives, and left the less skilled, both north and south, to shuffle for themselves. Furthermore, the industrial, militant character of southern workers' attempts at unionism did not fit into the conservative, craft type of unionism which the U. T. W. sponsored.

The advent of the World War opened up a new period of union struggles in the south. In 1914 a strike broke out in an Atlanta cotton mill when some union men were fired. Of the 900 workers involved, one hundred and thirty were children under sixteen years of age, earning as low as twenty-two cents a week. Two-thirds were women, who were receiving considerably less than the men's average wage of \$6.35 for over sixty hours' labor. The company immediately cut off food supplies at its store and evicted most of the strikers and their families. The union undertook to feed the strikers, and built a tent colony for shelter. After a year, the strike was declared lost and the union stated that all

it could do was to pay transportation charges for workers seeking employment elsewhere. The strike was typical of many that followed in Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, and the Carolinas. Wage increases, shortening of hours, elimination of child labor, and union recognition were usually the issues involved. In North Carolina over thirty thousand workers unionized and affiliated to the U. T. W., and another five thousand in South Carolina and Tennessee joined up. The I. W. W. also conducted some spontaneous strikes in North and South Carolina, but no permanent organization was established. A widespread reduction in southern hours of labor coincided with this drive, and a marked lessening in the number of child laborers below fourteen years of age was also achieved.

The strike which took place at this time at Anderson, S. C. was termed by U. T. W. leaders "the first, real, endorsed, legitimate strike in the south"<sup>1</sup>—a significant comment in view of the period of fifteen years in which the U. T. W. had held undisputed jurisdiction over the southern territory, and the large number of "unauthorized" strikes which had occurred there. However, due to Dixie mill hands' enthusiastic drive for unionism, the U. T. W. could claim in 1919, 45,000 dues-paying members in the Carolinas, with 67 new southern locals. One of these locals was composed of Negro workers, pickers and dye-house laborers, who had been segregated along race and craft lines.

The weaknesses inherent in the U. T. W.'s form of organization soon became apparent. By 1920 the number of southern locals had dropped to almost half, with correspondingly heavy losses in union membership. The depression of 1921 gave the mill owners an opportunity for introducing wage cuts ranging from 35 to 65 per cent in all southern cotton mills. Southern textile unionists in various sections struck against these wage cuts, but the U. T. W. suspended strike benefits during this period. In the face of company terrorism, injunctions, evictions, arrests, and cutting off of supplies, and with no effective support from

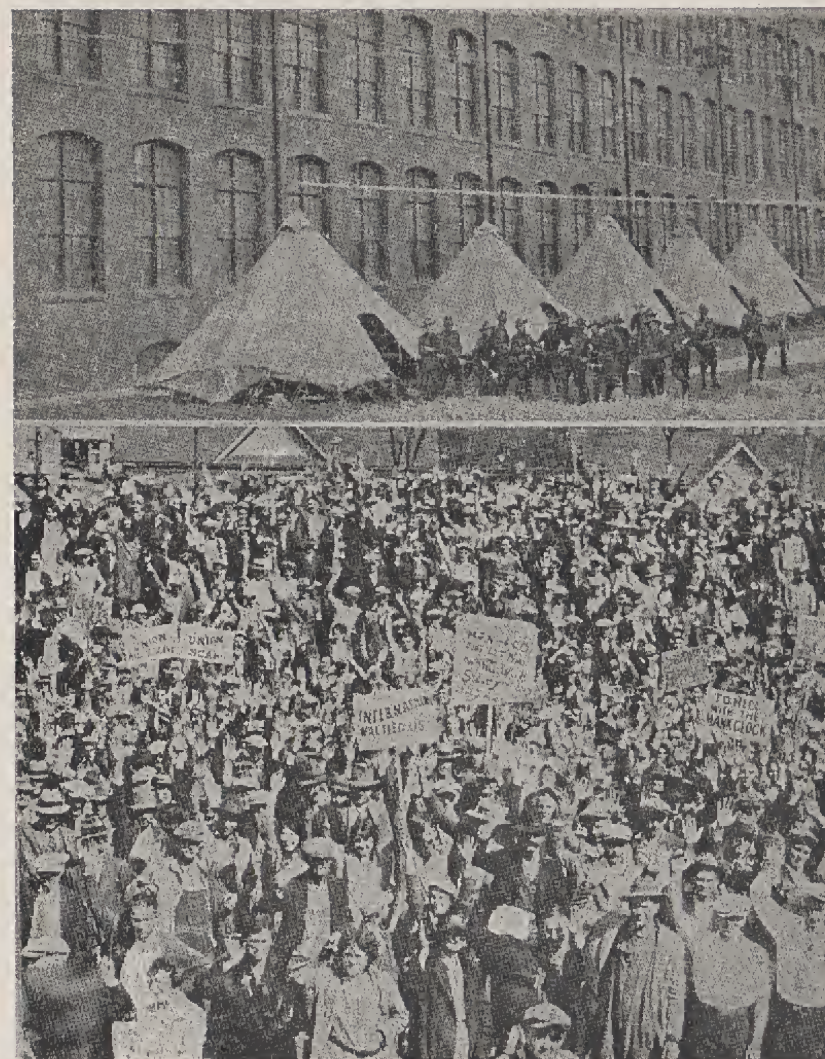
<sup>1</sup> Quotation taken from R. Dunn's article on *Southern Textile Unionism*, Fed. Press, May 11, 1929.



organized labor, the workers were literally starved back into the mills. Only a few paper locals survived. The workers were thoroughly disillusioned with the U. T. W., and temporarily too discouraged to continue their union efforts. However, an occasional effort was made, as that in Hendersonville, N. C., in 1927, where a six week's strike for higher wages and union recognition occurred. But this strike was lost and another local of the U. T. W. disappeared before it was well started.

Therefore, when the National Textile Workers, an industrial, revolutionary union organized in the latter part of 1928, entered the southern field it found approximately 300,000 mill workers totally without organization. (This new union had developed out of a revolt of a large section of the rank and file membership within the U. T. W., against the officialdom's failure to organize the American textile workers and lead them in struggles for their rights, its policies of craft unionism and co-operation with the employers, its fight against all militant action, and its attacks on Communists and left-wingers within the union.) The response of southern workers to the N. T. W. was immediate. Mill committees were formed in various plants throughout the Carolinas, and plans were made to extend organization throughout the section. The union set forth its program of concrete demands, including union recognition, opposition to the stretch-out and all speeding-up systems, wage increases with a minimum standard set at twenty dollars a week, the forty-hour, five-day week, equal pay for equal work, and elimination of all child labor. It also clearly defined its policy as one of class struggle and racial and international labor solidarity. On this basis a score of locals were quietly established. The readiness of southern mill hands to unionize and struggle for a better standard of living proved to be so great that the young union soon found its forces severely taxed to meet all the calls for organizational help which it received.

The mill owners, learning of this union campaign, immediately undertook to destroy it. Spies became active and union workmen were fired and turned out of their company dwellings.



*The watch-dogs of the mill bosses can't stop the workers' militant determination to build their union*



In Loray mill, at Gastonia, N. C., the discharge of six men and women led to a strike, on April first, 1929, of its approximately 2,000 operatives. The bulk of these, both white and colored, joined the N. T. W. and proceeded to organize into a strong local. Immediately the company placed a wire around the mill and called in state troops. Mass picket lines, although peaceful, were charged by police and troops and many arrests were made. Credit was cut off and the strikers and their families threatened with eviction. The National Textile Workers and the Communist Party at once began to rally all their forces in support of the strike. The Workers International Relief, a sympathetic organization, co-operated with the union in establishing a relief station where food supplies, medicine and clothing were supplied to strikers' families. International Labor Defense took over the legal defense of arrested workers, while the Daily Worker carried on the fight through its press. Meanwhile the company proceeded to evict strikers' families and throw their belongings into the street. No consideration was shown to ill persons or pregnant women. A tent colony was then built by the W. I. R. and a playground for workers' children was established. Local union members, of both sexes and all ages, took an active part in all phases of work. Mill workers in other centers eagerly gave assistance, while many poor farmers contributed to relief supplies, and militant labor throughout the country and abroad rallied to the Loray strikers' support. However, efforts to spread the strike over a wider territory were only partially successful, for the Loray revolt came before the ground for a widespread walkout in southern cotton mills had been fully prepared.

A masked mob, serving company interests, wrecked the relief station, throwing milk intended for strikers' babies and other food supplies, into the street. The workers replied by organizing another relief station in the tent colony and placing an armed guard there to protect against future outrages. Police activity became intensified, while local newspapers, under company direction, heaped abuse upon the Communist-led union and the local



ARMED WORKERS' DEFENSE CORPS  
*The Reply to the Bosses' Wrecking Policy*



strikers. There were rumors of plans to lynch strike leaders, and to wreck union headquarters.

Yet, in spite of company provocation and their own traditions for direct action, the strikers followed the counsel of union leadership and refused to be exasperated into acts of violence. Some weeks of struggle and great hardship followed. Management imported workers from outside, but when these recruits learned what was going on at Loray, they also prepared to strike. This made the company desperate. Following numerous threats, local police attempted to force an entrance into the relief center, and in the conflict between them and union guards which followed, a union organizer and three policemen were wounded and Gastonia's chief of police was killed. This gave Manville-Jenckes and Company the opportunity for which they had been seeking—an excuse for eliminating union leadership. Four score workers were arrested, and fifteen of them, including both national and local leaders, were indicted for murder. Among them were many who were not even in Gastonia on the night when the fighting occurred! Thus opens up another chapter in the frame-up against labor leaders who have dared to urge workers to revolt against intolerable conditions. At the present writing, labor both north and south is rallying to defense work, and the National Textile Workers' unionizing campaign is proceeding at an even greater pace. Over ninety mill committees, with a membership of 3,000, have been organized in the south. Although Loray mill is again operating on an open-shop basis, the Gastonia local of the N. T. W. continues to grow and consolidate its strength, and the Loray operatives say they are determined to seize the first opportunity of renewing the struggle.

During August, these workers won their first victory, when the mill companies of Gaston County announced a decrease of five hours in the working week with no cuts in wages. This change, which affects over twenty thousand workers, including those of Loray mill, constitutes an admission on the part of textile owners of the growing power of the National Textile Workers in the south. Having failed in their attempts to terrorize their

employees into submission, the mill companies are turning to concessions as a means of last resort for stemming the spread of unionism into the south.

But nothing can stop the revolt of Dixie mill hands, now under way. One striking evidence of this was the recent southern conference of the National Textile Workers Union and Trade Union Unity League, held in Charlotte, N. C. In spite of police terrorism and great financial difficulties, 338 delegates were present, from sixty-five cities and five states, representing, it is estimated, about 60,000 workers. All were united in their determination to fight the mill barons, and a program was adopted for establishing the N. T. W. throughout the south. A significant fact about this conference was the complete abolition of the Jim Crow system, with colored and white delegates sitting side by side, and freely intermingling. When delegates of both races emphasized the importance of joint action toward a common goal, they were roundly applauded. This indicates the substantial advance made by these southern workers, under revolutionary guidance, over their former race prejudices.

While organized strikes at Gastonia and Bessemer City, N. C., under N. T. W. leadership, have been under way, numerous other spontaneous strikes have broken out in various centers in the Carolinas, Georgia and Tennessee. Many of these have been directed against the stretch-out system and have been locally led. In some cases, the operatives have made a settlement with management and have returned to work, still non-unionized; in other instances, the N. T. W. or the U. T. W. have established locals. Those workers who have had previous experience with the U. T. W. will have nothing to do with this organization, feeling too keenly their treatment from it in the past; but among the inexperienced, the first union help offered has been gladly received.

In this present strike wave, the U. T. W. has pursued its policy of stepping in after a strike situation has developed, advising some quick form of settlement, enrolling members, and then practically withdrawing all active work in that locality.



However, the National Textile Workers' rapid development has led the U. T. W. to greater efforts, in order to hinder its rival's growth. This basis for its recent activities in the south is set forth in its organ, *"The Textile Worker,"* for April, 1929. An editorial from a southern conservative paper is also quoted, welcoming the U. T. W. as the southern manufacturers' protector against Communist unionism. *The Textile Worker* comments that an U. T. W. campaign in the south among the now fully aroused operatives "will bring to all concerned contentment and peace." (Italics ours.) The editor goes on to make it clear that U. T. W. officials wish to co-operate with the mills "in introducing modern methods of manufacturing to reduce costs. The union sees the importance of reducing costs that are proven to be unnecessarily high as a result of waste or inefficiency on the part of labor or management, but we are opposed to imposition of any plan applying only to labor and without consultation with the workers and their representatives." In other words, the U. T. W. offers management its help in persuading the workers to accept the stretch-out and other rationalization schemes—against which the workers have been protesting so vigorously. In April the U. T. W. finally formulated a series of demands for southern industry, which are: abolition of night work for women and children, "standardization" of wages, the forty-eight hour week, and introduction of rationalization schemes through mutual agreement of union and management. It is significant that none of these demands have been pushed by U. T. W. in any of the southern strike situations under its direction. Also the omissions in the program are significant. There are no demands relating to abolition of child labor in the industry, equalization of wages for women, and unionization of Negro mill workers on an equal basis with the whites, with specific demands formulated to take care of their problems. Form of organization is not discussed, so it may be assumed that the U. T. W. will continue its policy of promoting its twenty-one craft bodies, although craft unionism has shown itself to be an antiquated, incompetent, form of organization. Strikes as an organizational weapon are openly



*While bosses try to break strikes through wholesale evictions—*



*the Workers International Relief provides food and shelter for the strikers and their families*



deplored by U. T. W. officials. Each issue of *"The Textile Worker"* includes such statements as "We regret to report that Glanzstoff workers of Elizabethton, Tennessee, were compelled to strike," and "There is a strike at Allentown, which is unfortunate, to say the least." Articles and editorials pointing out the supposed common interests of labor and capital are numerous. William Green, president of the A. F. of L., was quoted as saying, in connection with U. T. W. activities in the south, "We do not want to hurt the mills. We want to help the mills, business and everyone." In other words, the U. T. W. will not attack the mill owners' profits made out of child labor and over-worked, impoverished operatives.

The recent strike at Elizabethton, Tennessee, of 5,500 rayon workers gives in a concrete form the policy of the U. T. W. in dealing with strike situations and workers' self-initiated unionizing campaigns. Also Elizabethton furnishes another example of southern workers' militancy. The rayon operatives struck for the repeal of a fifteen per cent wage cut which had been given them some time previously, for redress against certain grievances, and for recognition of their rights of organization. The majority



*Mass picketing, not hymn singing, is the new slogan of Southern labor*

of those employed at the struck plants were women, and there were also some children as young as twelve who had worked there. The first day after the walkout, the strikers entered the mills and brought out those few who had remained at work.

Immediately the Glanzstoff and Bemberg plants secured an injunction against the strikers, and called in state troops. The strikers, not at all intimidated by the company and state forces, lined up against them, organized their picket lines, and not a man passed those lines. The pickets stood, their rifles with them, as guardsmen on post. They dug trenches around the plants, and lay in them, ready for action, should action become necessary. Whenever anyone not a probable strike-breaker came along, every rifle disappeared down a trouser's leg or under an apron.

For two days an airplane flew hour after hour over the Glanzstoff plant, within twenty feet of its roof. Nobody except local leaders know where that plane came from, who flew it, or where it went, but everyone felt sure it was procured by strikers or friends. Ten cases of dynamite disappeared from the plant property the first day of the strike. Again, no outsiders knew where it went, but the rumor was that it was taken away by workmen and put where no one could use it in such a way as to blame its use on strikers. A train load of strike-breakers was stopped. This act was against orders from strike headquarters, where the U. T. W. had now taken charge and was attempting to bring the strike to a quick conclusion. But the strike-breakers on the train did not get into the mill, and the engineer of the train, when he learned the facts, said he would not run his train into the mill yards, even if it had a clear right of way. Everywhere labor's ranks expressed a similar solidarity with the strikers.

In the meantime, U. T. W. officials were successful in bringing the strike to a close. The settlement agreed upon with the company stipulated that there was to be no discrimination against strikers on account of union membership or recent activities, and a slight increase in wages was secured, although far less than the original increase demanded by the workers. The workers, dissatisfied, but not knowing what else to do, returned to work—



to find that the company had no intention of living up to the agreement. One hundred and fifty operatives were fired the first few days, and within a short time the number had risen to three hundred. Indignant and amazed, the workers turned to U. T. W. for counsel—but the U. T. W. organizer had left town the day the settlement had been made. Thereupon the workers again took matters into their own hands and struck the plants for a second time. Immediately U. T. W. officials were again upon the scene, and at their request, a Federal conciliator was called in. The following story of the events which followed, and the U. T. W.'s part in them is taken from "*The Textile Worker*," and was written by Hoffman, U. T. W. representative in Elizabethton. The story begins with Hoffman's return at the beginning of the second strike:



*Elizabethton workers struggled against company barriers, state forces and the treachery of the American Federation of Labor and "labor progressives"*

"Tues. Apr. 2.—The police officer and sheriff came to confer with me on the situation. I assured them that if the company would enforce the agreement there would be no trouble, and that *we were holding down the workers and keeping them quiet to the best of our ability. They expressed anxiety over what another strike would mean to the business men and feared it would mean bankruptcy for the town. They left satisfied.* (Italics mine. M. P.) A mass meeting was held at night (just a 'pep' meeting), and about 2,500 attended. McGrady (A. F. of L. representative) spoke and so did I. *The same night McGrady went to the Chamber of Commerce and addressed their board of directors, advising them to try to alleviate suspicion (i. e., of workers) and talked along the line of co-operation.*

"Wed., Apr. 3.—Early in the morning the Board of Directors, through the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, asked McGrady to come to their offices for another conference. He met the company doctor and employment manager of the Bemberg and several other men and had a two and a half hour conference with these men on bringing about an understanding between the workers and the company. Some degree of understanding was reached. In the afternoon, the President of the local met with the employment manager and they went over cases of discrimination together." According to its own story, the U. T. W. directed its major attention towards co-operation with the Chamber of Commerce and the owners of the plants against which the workers had struck, while its policy with the strikers was one of "holding them down as much as possible," and "keeping them quiet,"—at the very time when the workers were looking for leadership to direct their struggles on to victory.

Hoffman concludes his story of developments with a description of his kidnapping by a masked mob of local real estate men, who saw their boom of Elizabethton as a fine industrial center, with a plentiful supply of cheap, docile labor, doomed by the strike. Hoffman was quite indignant over the business men's mistaking him for a labor agitator and motivating force in the strike, when he had been trying always to play the role of peace-



maker. After this incident, the local workers formed an armed guard for Hoffman and McGrady. The strike continued for seven more weeks, the operatives refusing to go back into the mills until the company had conceded to their demands. Glanzstoff-Bemberg Corporation employed all the usual methods of armed force, evictions, arrests, withdrawal of credit at the company store, and intimidation. One of the local strike leader's home was dynamited and completely destroyed. The family only escaped through not being at home when the explosion occurred. The workers had to depend primarily on themselves for relief, since the U. T. W. offered almost no aid and the sums collected by volunteer committees were insufficient to meet the need. Many families, in order to obtain food, had to return to their mountain farming. In consequence, when the sudden news came that the strike was to be settled, and a meeting on May 25 was called to ratify the agreement, only 2,000 of the 5,500 strikers were on hand to vote on the question. The "peace terms" had been secured by the Labor Department's mediator and a committee of five workers. This committee had not been elected democratically by the strikers, but had been chosen by U. T. W. organizers. The terms offered by the mill owners were read:

1. All employees were to register immediately.
  2. If an employee is not reinstated, definite reasons shall be given such employee, and if he feels he is being discriminated against, he may refer his case to an impartial person for a hearing and decision. The impartial person in such cases was to be E. T. Willson, the company's employment manager, whose appointment was announced shortly before the meeting was called to vote on the terms.
  3. Management will not discriminate against an employee because of membership in any organization, nor because of legitimate and lawful activities in such organization as long as they are carried on outside the plants.
  4. For the purpose of adjusting grievances which may arise, the management will meet a committee of its employees.
- As the agreement was being read, the strikers murmured

angrily among themselves, and at the close, a tremendous "No" rose to the building's rafters. Boos came from every part of the hall. Discrimination, they felt, was actually written into the agreement. And where were the recognition of their union, the eight-hour day and the wage increases for which they had struggled all these weeks? A. F. of L. officials argued with the angry strikers for three hours, to get them to accept this settlement. Not once did the U. T. W. organizers raise a question about the lack of union recognition in the agreement. Their explanation of their action was given in the June issue of *"The Textile Worker,"* where they state that although union representatives would personally have preferred to have had union recognition included in the agreement, they wisely refrained from trying to influence the Elizabethton workers, but, in the interests of "democracy," let them decide this matter for themselves! No mention was made in the editorial of the three hours of persuasion they exerted on these same workers to accept the settlement as it stood.

During the long argument between A. F. of L. representatives and the strikers over ending the strike on these terms, the workers, lacking a leadership to head up their opposition, became confused and dazed by official oratory. But whenever the settlement was re-read, there were "boos" from the strikers. Finally, a standing vote was called for, and silently the workers rose and as silently marched from the hall. They had accepted the settlement, but not with a sense of victory, but of defeat and with misgivings. Everywhere in the crowds of workmen outside the hall there were comments: "They broke the strike," "It's a sell-out!" "There's holes in that agreement as big as yore garage door—holes big enough to drive a hearse through." "This settlement's like the other. The company ain't pinned down to anything. There's going to be discrimination."

The workers' misgivings soon proved correct, for scores were refused work, and the local union is much weakened. A company union is being organized, with management trying, through coercive and persuasive means, to get their employees to join and



give up their real union. But the rayon operatives are heeding the words of one of their local leaders who reminds them that "a cow needs her tail in fly time." The experience of Elizabethton workers with the U. T. W. has been recently repeated in Greenville, S. C., and Marion, N. C., where this union came in to take charge of strike situations which had developed. The U. T. W. organizer was booed down by Marion mill hands, when he advised them to use less militant tactics in their struggle, but to take bibles and hymn books along with them to the picket lines, instead.

A strike settlement was made in Marion which, like that in Elizabethton, was no settlement at all from the workers' standpoint, but a complete give-in to the mill owners. Discrimination against active unionists began immediately, and so, like the Elizabethton workers, the Marion workers took matters into their own hands and went on strike the second time. While picketing the mill, union ranks were fired upon by the local sheriff and company deputies, and six strikers were killed and twenty more wounded. Yet, so closely do the courts, police and mill owners work together that not a conviction was made, although the firing took place in broad daylight and scores of eye witnesses testified as to the guilty parties. Mill hands indignantly compare this "justice" with the "justice" meted out to the Gastonia strikers. They say, rightly, "There is one law for the mill workers and another for the mill bosses and their aides." In fact, the mill company at Marion not only saw to it that their hirelings went scott free, but had the most active Marion workers evicted, and indicted for "inciting to riot" and rebellion against the state. Furthermore, the local church did the company's bidding and expelled over one hundred of the strikers—because these members had dared to rebel against the company's authority!

It is events like these that are opening the eyes of southern mill workers and showing them the class character of present government and of the church. Also, it is happenings like these at Marion, Elizabethton, Greenville, S. C. and numerous other

places, that have made them distrustful of U. T. W. and other A. F. of L. officials, with their "peace at any price" philosophy, do-nothing policies and sell-out settlements. So now the U. T. W., in its fight on the N. T. W., is employing the "labor progressives," like Muste, Tippet, Hoffman, and Ross to come along and put a little show of pep and vitality into this dying organization. But at Marion and Elizabethton, these progressives again showed that when it came to *action*, they follow the same policies as the U. T. W., of dampening the workers' militancy and confusing the issues. Then, after poor strike settlements have been made, they busy themselves apologizing for these and trying to explain them away. But no amount of "explaining" can persuade the Marion workers that they have not been betrayed into defeat. They have nothing but scorn for such "explanations" as offered by Tippet and others for the Marion sell-outs. "It is true," Tippet is quoted as saying, "that it was a poor settlement, but in Hoffman's defense it must be stated that this settlement was made at the point of a bayonet." What a position!—To say to these fighting mill hands: Workers must retreat under fire! It is the same as telling them that they can never hope to win, for company and police terrorism on southern mill hills will remain the order of the day.

Another example of the role which these so-called progressives are playing was given at the funeral of the Marion strikers, when Muste appealed to the "State of North Carolina to cleanse her hands of blood . . . and act to bring about higher textile wages and shorter hours." (N. Y. Times, Oct. 4, 1929.) Whether such remarks spring from gross ignorance or mere hypocrisy is beside the point. What is to the point is that such talk and advice serve to confuse workers and raise illusions about the "State of North Carolina" being other than what it is: a mill bosses' government, from which the workers can only expect oppression. Furthermore, these progressives worked with union leaders in having a committee appointed to intercede with the Governor to bring about a strike settlement, and on this committee "for the workers" were recommended a representative of the Federal Council of Churches and a mill owner. Since when did mill



owners side against their fellow profit-takers with the workers, and since when did mill workers need or trust mill bosses to push their cause, or depend upon arbitration to promote their interests? The entire history of arbitration reveals it to be an instrument of the ruling class which is used against the wage-earners.

The Marion workers showed themselves far ahead of the A. F. of L., U. T. W. and Muste-Ross-Tippet leadership in their courage, militancy and reliance, not upon bosses' government, or churchmen, but upon their own organized strength.

Southern textile workers are beginning to see clearly the differences between the National Textile Workers, affiliated to the Trade Union Unity League, the American Section of the Red International of Labor Unions, and the United Textile Workers, affiliated to the American Federation of Labor. The first they have found to be a union which carries on a militant struggle in the workers' behalf, on the basis of clearly formulated demands; the second they have learned through many bitter experiences, is an organization which fears all class struggle, but declares itself for peaceful methods of co-operation with the employers, and betrays the workers into false settlements which gain them nothing. The N. T. W., they find, bases itself on democracy within the union, and proves, by actions, its belief in southern mill workers' ability of leadership and organization; the U. T. W., on the other hand, distrusts the rank and file and has stated at various times that it is impossible to organize southern mill hands. While the N. T. W. organizes black and white workers on an equal footing in industrial unions and unites them in struggles for full economic, political and social rights for colored as well as white, the U. T. W. either ignores Negro mill workers entirely or segregates them into separate locals and neglects their interests. Also it usually divides workers along craft lines. In times of strike, the N. T. W. actively participates and gives organizational and financial aid, but the U. T. W. gives little of either. In consequence, textile unionists in the south are turning to the N. T. W., and not the U. T. W. for leadership. They are beginning to see that only through militant struggle

on a national and international scale can they build their union and win their demands. The N. T. W., realizing its opportunities and tasks in the south, is proceeding on a carefully worked-out plan of organization. A network of mill committees is being organized throughout the cotton region, and union forces are solidifying north and south. Especial attention is being given to the development of local leaderships, and the development of rank and file understanding. When southern unionists and national leadership consider the time is ripe, a widespread strike will occur, and this time southern workers expect to wage an effective fight and establish militant unionism as a permanent factor in the southern textile industry.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### *OUTLOOK FOR SOUTHERN MILL WORKERS.*

THE conclusions which stand out from the facts of southern mill life are clear and unmistakable. While the southern press, pulpit, and schoolroom, with few dissenting voices, have combined to praise the cotton mill owners' paternalism and treatment of their employees, the mill workers are living in company-ruled towns and are being exploited at a tremendous rate. Also their children, who in a few years must go into the cotton mills, will be spared a similar existence only through the determined efforts of mill workers themselves to change conditions.

Furthermore, in the period following the World War, the mill owners have shown themselves determined to increase this exploitation even further. Wages have been reduced by nearly one-fifth, while the stretch-out and various other systems of speed-up are being introduced. Southern manufacturers are urged on, in these policies of rationalization, by their desire for greater profits, and by the fierce competition which exists among textile owners around the world for markets for their product. In this competitive scramble, it is the textile workers not only of the southern cotton states, but also of New England, China, Japan,



India and England, who pay the price, in lengthened hours, lowered pay, speeding up and increasing unemployment. As markets become more and more flooded with textile goods and competition grows therefore ever more fierce, the manufacturers will attempt to drive the workers' standard of living even lower, so that they may be able to undersell competitors.

But all these efforts for greater and greater output at less and less cost simply increase the world-wide chaos in the textile industry, for the market demand for textile products fails to keep pace with the mounting output of the mills. One main factor in this situation is that the wage-earning class which forms the vast majority of the population of all countries, receives under capitalist rule such low wages that workers can not purchase sufficient of the products of industry. So long as capitalism exists, where goods are produced solely for profits of those who own the textile mills, steel plants, railroads and mines, etc., this chaos will go on; for it is not possible in a system based on private property to have a scientific organization and central plan of production and distribution of goods, in line with the actual needs of consumers.

In the textile industry the contradictions inherent in its present organization have reached the stage where a permanent, international crisis exists. Only a fundamental reorganization of the industry can liquidate this crisis and furnish mill workers a decent standard of living, but such reorganization involves a new system of collective ownership and operation of mills, in a society which is under workers' economic and political control.

This, then, is the double perspective opening up before southern mill hands: Under capitalism, further enslavement to the job-owners, reduced standards of living, recurrent wars which are always "poor man's war and rich man's fight." Under workers' rule, freedom from bosses' tyranny, constantly improving standards of living, and enduring peace. Dixie mill hands, in taking up the fight for unionism, learn that workers in all parts of the earth are organizing and on the march along this route, militantly struggling for better conditions of life, and for their

socialist aims. They find the Labor Movement, of which they are now a part, increasing in gigantic strides, from ten million in 1910 to approximately fifty million in 1928, and including within its ranks, textile workers of the Orient, England, Germany, Poland, Russia, New England and Dixie.

In contrast to their worsening conditions, southern operatives learn with astonishment of the achievements of the textile workers in Soviet Russia. Since the workers took control there, in 1917, mill operatives have reduced their working day from nine and one-half to seven hours, and their real wages have increased by thirty-one per cent. While Dixie mill hands fight rationalization schemes, Russian workers welcome them, for there these changes are carried through for their benefit, rather than at their expense. The gain in real wages is reflected not only in the pay envelope, but also in other ways, such as in the regulations for two weeks' vacations with pay each year, unemployment insurance, workmen's compensation and a system of old age pensions. Also, women workers get leave of absence with pay for two months before and after child birth, free medical attention, and an allowance for the child's care for nine months. Furthermore, all elements of the toiling population have secured educational opportunities through their unions, co-operatives and clubs which they never had before, while the new public school system which the Soviet Union has built up furnishes unusual educational opportunities to their children.

In the South the struggle for unionism and workers' demands is just getting under way. In this struggle Dixie mill hands will undoubtedly play a foremost role. With the growth of the forces of militant labor both at home and abroad, southern textile workers can count on strong support. Southern workers, on their part, are learning that the problems which they face in the cotton mills are basically the same as those which textile and all other workers struggling against capitalism face, and that therefore they must unite forces for joint action on an international scale. Also they are beginning to see that labor solidarity can recognize no division along race, sex, or craft lines, and that



in the south as elsewhere, this involves a fearless struggle for full economic, political and social equality for colored as well as white workers. Their experiences are teaching them, too, that struggles for economic rights are political struggles as well, with the whole machinery of government utilized by the mill owners against them. This is no accident. Every strike, every serious unionizing campaign is a threat to the power of the bosses and to the security of the "democratic" government which they have built up and control, and so as soon as the wage-earners in cotton mills or any other industry begin a fight for their demands, they find the local, state, and national government working with the owners, in sending in troops to protect strike-breakers and shoot down militant workers, in giving sweeping injunctions against the strikers, making wholesale arrests, evicting from company dwellings, and in framing up leaders and railroading them to long-term imprisonment or to the electric chair. Under the guise of "public interest," the local or national government may step in, as it did in the Elizabethton strike, to act as an "impartial mediator," but again it works in the interests of the owners, luring the workers back to work with false promises and so betraying their strike. Altogether, "American Democracy" has proven itself a hoax, used by the mill and other owners to blind the workers to the fact that the government is an instrument of the bosses, the ruling class, which is used to maintain their power against the onslaughts of the working class. Since the workers, in fighting for unionism and their elementary rights, have to fight the state as well, they must have political as well as economic weapons with which to fight. It is obvious that the old parties have nothing to offer them, since these parties are likewise controlled by the bosses. Therefore Dixie mill hands must organize politically and together with the rest of the working class, push on until both economic and state power are wrested out of the hands of the capitalist bosses and securely in their own.

This is the perspective opening up before southern mill workers. They know that in labor's organized strength, alone, lies the promise of the future.

## Mobilize for Struggle

### A CALL TO ACTION TO ALL TEXTILE WORKERS

*by the Second National Convention of the National Textile Workers Union, held in Paterson, New Jersey, December 21-22.*

**I**N every section of the textile industry the workers are faced with wage cuts. Together with the wage cuts, the speed-up and stretch-out is being daily increased, and as a result unemployment is steadily increasing. The swiftly developing crisis of American capitalism, the Wall Street crash, the tremendous over-production, are shaking the textile industry from top to bottom.

The Second Convention of the *National Textile Workers Union* mobilized the workers in every important textile center, both in the North and in the South, and has laid plans for a general struggle in the whole textile industry.

Thousands of textile workers in the South, in New England, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York, suffering under the crushing burden of speed-up, wage cuts, and unemployment, are ready for a struggle under the leadership of the *National Textile Workers Union*. The silk and dye workers of Paterson, Allentown, Scranton, Pawtucket, and other silk centers, are preparing for a national strike against the attempts of the bosses, helped by the A. F. of L., the U. T. W., and the Musteites, to starve the workers into submission.

In the South, the mill owners are trying to smash the resistance of the workers by a reign of terror. The savage twenty-year sentences for the organizers of the *National Textile Workers Union*, the murder of Ella May, the kidnapping of Elbert Tothorow, Youth Organizer of the Union, and the fake A. F. of L. drive in the South is an attempt to stop the rising tide of revolt,



and the continued rallying of the masses of southern textile workers under the banner of the *National Textile Workers Union*. The Negro textile workers in the South, as well as in the North, are joining the ranks of the class struggle side by side with their white brothers. We call upon all workers in every textile mill to form mill committees of action, to organize the entire mill and to prepare for the coming struggle. *A National Textile Workers Union Local in Every Textile Mill!*

The convention of the *National Textile Workers Union* calls upon all textile workers to struggle against the coming capitalist war that is being brought about by bosses' greed for profits. It will be the textile workers, together with the workers in the other industries, who will have to carry additional burdens of exploitation as a result of the war and the preparations for it.

Demand the 8-hour day; 40-hour week! Demand from the bosses unemployment insurance and sick benefits!

Complete class solidarity with the Southern textile workers, white and black! Fight for the unconditional release of the seven Gastonia class-war prisoners!

Fight against the misleaders of the A. F. of L. and the U. T. W.—the worst traitors of the workers' interests!

*Join the National Textile Workers Union! Prepare for Struggle!*

## NATIONAL TEXTILE WORKERS UNION

### National Office

Room 1707, 104 Fifth Avenue, New York City.

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| 1 Year Sub to LABOR DEFENDER...                              | \$1.00 |
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| BOTH FOR \$3.50 <input type="checkbox"/>                     |        |
| 6 Months Sub to DAILY WORKER...                              | \$3.50 |
| 1 Year Sub to LABOR DEFENDER...                              | \$1.00 |
| BOTH FOR \$2.00 <input type="checkbox"/>                     |        |

LABOR DEFENDER 80 East 11th Street, New York, N. Y.

Enclosed find \$..... for one year sub to the LABOR DEFENDER, or for sub to LABOR DEFENDER with one of the special offers as checked above.

Address .....Name .....

City .....State .....